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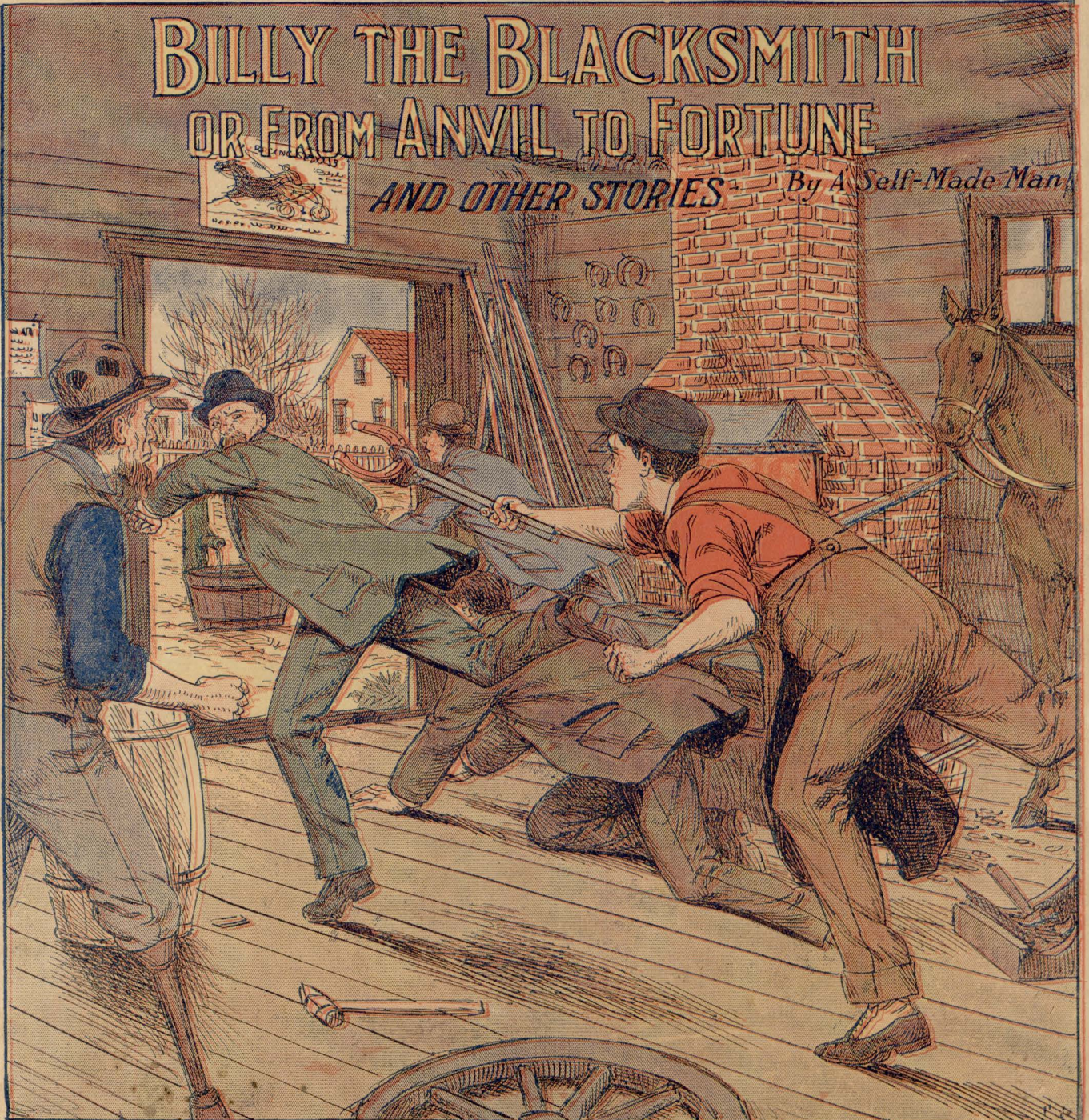
FORTUNE WEEKLY.

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY.

BILLY THE BLACKSMITH OR FROM ANVIL TO FORTUNE

AND OTHER STORIES

By A Self-Made Man



The animal kicked and Billy turned around in time to detect their game. "What are you up to?" he cried angrily. Dropping the mare's foot he sprang at the rascals. The trio started for the door in a hurry.

Fame and Fortune Weekly

STORIES OF BOYS WHO MAKE MONEY

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No. 331.

NEW YORK, FEBRUARY 2, 1912.

Price 5 Cents.

BILLY THE BLACKSMITH

OR,

FROM ANVIL TO FORTUNE

By A SELF-MADE MAN

CHAPTER I.

BILLY BLAKE AND OTHERS.

"What are you doing, Billy?" asked Dick Hudson, walking into John Hooley's blacksmith shop where his particular friend, Billy Blake, was employed as chief helper to the owner.

"I'm tempering these pieces of steel for Judson, up the road," replied Billy, in his customary cheerful way, "and when I get that job done I have to file them down to a dull-pointed end."

As he spoke Billy pulled one of the steel pieces out of the forge fire and thrust it, hissing, into a tub of water.

The shop was situated on the outskirts of the bustling town of Davenport, and was divided from Hooley's cottage by a vegetable garden.

Billy Blake was understood to be a distant relative of Hooley's—adopted by the blacksmith when Billy was too young to remember anything about his real parents.

As Hooley had been a blacksmith all his life, it was natural that he should teach the trade to Billy.

The boy got his first insight into the business at odd times while attending school, and put in the greater part of his vacations around the forge.

He was now eighteen and a good, practical workman.

In fact, he did nearly all the work of the shop, for Hooley had fallen into the bad habit of spending most of his time, to the neglect of his business, at a nearby dram-shop, where he posed as a champion of the common people, putting up a constant howl about the inequality of the established order of things.

Not being very well educated there was more hot air than argument in his outbursts against rich men and the rapacity of the trusts.

He was rabidly in favor of an equal division of the world's wealth, in spite of the fact that were such a division to be made it would greatly reduce his current income.

This might look distinterested on his part, but it was really due to his ignorance on the subject.

It had been observed by those who had known him for a considerable time that whether business was good or bad with him he always had money in his pocket to spend, and he spent it, thereby acquiring the reputation of a good fellow.

It had also been noticed that he was flusher during the first week of a month, as a rule, than at any other time.

His cronies, therefore, believed that he collected his bills around that time, which would account for the enlarged size of his roll at that particular part of the month.

At any rate, so far as any one knew, his source of income was confined to his business, and as his shop was well patronized he was in no danger of going to the poorhouse.

Dick Hudson lived with his parents in the cottage next door to Hooley, and he spent a good part of his leisure time with Billy.

On the day our story opens he had been fishing, and when he entered the blacksmith shop he had two dozen fair-sized fish dangling from a cord he carried in his hand.

"What is Judson going to make with those pieces of steel?" he asked.

"How do I know? I didn't ask him."

"You do quite a bit of blacksmith work for him. He must be making some kind of a machine in his house."

"I don't know of any law against him spending his time that way if he wants to."

"Maybe he's an inventor."

"Maybe he is. He must have money, or an income, for he doesn't do any regular work. I've heard that he hangs around Bogan's, where you can place money in wagers."

"There's going to be a race meeting at the track here shortly."

"So the posters around town say."

"The paper said last evening that some of the fastest horses in the business will be brought here to attend it."

"Then it's sure to be a success. It will bring a bunch of strangers into town—mostly people who follow the sport about the country, and make the blacksmith's business good."

"The Carters ought to enter Black Bess in one of the running events. The mare can go some. I think she'd stand a good show of winning."

"The animal belongs to Bess Carter, and she might not care to race her pet. You see, if she did she'd have to secure a reliable jockey. If she only ran Black Bess in one race she'd have to borrow a jockey from somebody. Then she could hardly depend on a stranger. If the mare won the first heat in good style the fellow might be tampered with and paid to lose the other heats. I've heard that there is a lot of crooked work about horse racing, and the owner of a good racehorse entered at a meet has got to be continually on the watch to insure himself a fair show."

"I guess Miss Carter wouldn't make anything by running her animal."

"That's my opinion, particularly as Black Bess is only used to being ridden by Miss Bessie herself. With a stranger on her back she might cut up and spoil all her chances of winning."

"That's right. I never thought of that," said Dick, with a nod.

At that moment a roughly dressed man, with a wooden leg, entered the shop by the back door.

He was an ex-sea captain, named Ezra Gale, and Mrs. Hooley was his sister.

He lived at the cottage and put in his time in various ways, chiefly in the vegetable garden, but was always ready to lend Billy a hand if he was around, for he and the boy were on the best of terms.

"Hello, cap'n," said Dick.

"Howdy do, young man?" replied the mariner, in a fog-horn voice.

The captain had a long-stemmed Dutch pipe in his mouth which was his constant companion.

About the only time it was not in his mouth was when he was in bed.

"How does the wind blow, cap'n?" grinned Dick.

"Wes-sou'-west-by-half-west," replied the skipper, without the least hesitation.

"I didn't notice that there was any wind," said Dick.

"When the wind blows from that quarter it's a sort of zephyr—you've got to wet your finger and hold it up to feel it," said Gale. "What are you making now, Billy—something for yourself?"

"No; these pieces of steel were brought here by Judson to be tempered and then filed. Heré, don't handle that one. It's hot."

The captain pointed to another.

"Can I look at that one?" he said.

"Yes. I haven't had that in the forge yet."

"What's Judson going to do with these things?" asked the captain, after he had examined the piece of steel.

"You've got me, cap'n," said Billy. "He's making something that they are a part of."

"Hum! I saw the expressman deliver a hand-lathe at his house yesterday, and the day before he left a box that contained something so heavy that it was all he could do to carry it into the cottage. I asked him what it was, but he didn't know. He said it came from Chicago by express."

"I saw some packages addressed to him at the express office two weeks ago," said Dick. "He is surely making some kind of a machine. I'd give something to know what it is. Maybe it's some invention that he'll make a raft of money out of when he gets it finished."

"He may make a lot of money out of the idea, but not out of a single machine," said Billy. "He is probably making a working model to have patented."

"Been fishing, eh?" said the captain, looking at the string of fish in Dick's hand.

"Yes. Took me all morning to catch these."

"You've got a good mess, at any rate," said Billy.

"More than a mess. I guess I can spare a few for you folks to have for your lunch."

"Thanks. We'll appreciate them, won't we, cap'n?"

The skipper said they certainly would, as there wasn't anything he liked better than fish right out of the water, so Dick handed him over eight, and Ezra Gale hastened toward the house with them, for dinner hour was close at hand.

At that moment a pretty girl, of a brunette complexion, mounted on a jet-black mare with a white star between her eyes, appeared in front of the shop.

Billy dropped the job he was on and rushed to the door.

"Good-morning, Miss Carter!" he said, touching his cap.

"Good-morning, Billy!" replied the young lady, with a smile.

"One of Bess' shoes, the hind one on the right, has come loose. I want you to fix it."

She sprang lightly to the ground, without assistance, holding up her natty riding costume with one hand.

"All right, Miss Bessie," replied Billy, stroking the animal down the nose.

The mare threw up her head and then rubbed her nose against the young blacksmith's arm, which was one of the ways she expressed her friendliness toward a person.

Billy led her inside, and picking up her hind leg looked at the shoe.

He repaired the trouble in a few minutes.

"There you are, Miss Carter," he said. "The charge is one smile, which you paid in advance."

The girl laughed.

"I'm afraid Mr. Hooley couldn't make much out of that," she said.

"Don't you worry about it. Mr. Hooley is not in need of money," said Billy.

"I should judge not. He doesn't work much these days. You appear to be in charge of the shop most of the time."

"Yes, I do about nine-tenths of the work that comes here."

"It seems a shame for him to make you do so much. He's a strong, healthy man and ought to do his share, like he used to."

"Oh, well, I've got to earn my board, clothes and spending-money. As long as I am busy here I am out of mischief," he chuckled.

"You're not a mischievous boy. I think you're——"

She stopped, a bit confused.

"You think I'm what?"

"Oh, nothing. I——"

"You think I'm nothing?" laughed Billy.

"Dear me, no," blushed Bessie. "I didn't mean that. I meant——"

"Yes?"

"I don't want to say what I meant. It was complimentary, so there," and she blushed again.

"Thank you, Miss Bessie, but not half as complimentary as what I could say about you if I dared."

"Then I'm glad you don't dare say it. Compliments only embarrass the recipient."

"You've no objection to me thinking them, have you?"

"Of course not, but I don't think I deserve any compliments at all."

"If you don't nobody does. I think you're the finest girl in town," said Billy, in a tone that showed he meant it.

"There, you've gone and done it after all!" blushed Bessie, more rosily than ever.

"I beg your pardon. I really couldn't help expressing my sentiments."

"Oh, well, you're forgiven, but don't do it again," she said, shaking her finger warningly at him. "Will you assist me to mount?"

"With the greatest pleasure," said Billy, eagerly grasping one of her gloved hands as she placed the other on Black Bess' neck.

With a light spring she was in the saddle.

"Good-by, Billy!" she said, waving her hand that held the fancy whip which she carried more for show than service.

"Good-by, Miss Bessie!" said the young blacksmith, pulling off his cap.

Then she cantered away.

"Fine girl, Miss Carter," said Dick.

"Bet your life she is! She's in a class by herself."

At that juncture Captain Gale came to the door and called Billy to dinner.

"So long, Billy; I'll see you this afternoon," said Dick, starting out of the door and taking the road to his own house.

CHAPTER II.

BILLY MAKES A DISCOVERY.

They had the fish for dinner at the Hooley home.

The captain had persuaded his sister to sidetrack the meat she had contemplated serving up, and he helped himself to a whole fish as soon as he deposited his wooden leg under the table.

He contemplated the brown and palatable-looking finny thing with an anticipatory sigh of satisfaction and then fell to with a great appetite.

The head of the house, Mr. Hooley himself, was not present.

This was nothing unusual, and Mrs. Hooley had got into the habit of ignoring his absence.

She recognized the fact that Billy and the captain were the workers and had to be fed, so if her husband failed to turn up by the end of the meal she placed a portion in the oven to await his convenience.

Hooley never kicked.

He was a big man, and an overbearing one in his way, and his wife was a little woman, but, nevertheless, whatever she said or done went in the house.

Outside the door her influence ceased.

Mr. Hooley did about as he chose, without much reference to what she thought about it.

If this procedure on his part led to a certain lecture afterward he took it, said nothing, and kept on in his customary way just the same.

The meal was half through when Hooley turned up, took his place at the head of the table and helped himself to what remained on the dishes.

"What have you been doing this morning since I left the shop?" he asked his assistant.

"Not a whole lot," replied Billy. "Shoed a couple of horses, repaired the tongue of a wagon, and I am now doing a small job for Judson."

"What is it?" asked Hooley, curiously.

The boy told him.

"Is that man fixing up a machine shop in his house?"

"I don't know."

"You've been doing quite a number of small jobs for him."

"I know it. I think he's building some kind of a machine."

"What kind of a machine?"

"I don't know anything about it. I haven't seen it. I only judge he must be doing such a thing from what I've done for him."

"Isn't it a strange thing for him to be building a machine in his house?"

"Not particularly. It is probably an invention of his that he's putting together."

"Then why doesn't he have a regular machinist build it in his shop?"

"He probably wishes to keep the main points of its construction a secret until he has patented it."

"He couldn't patent it by means of drawings, couldn't he? That's the way Davis got a patent on his corn-sheller."

"I don't know anything about the requirements of patent applications. I don't even know whether Judson is an inventor. All I know is that I've made him a number of small iron articles, and have fixed up several steel things, according to his directions. The articles he brought me all looked like parts of a machine. He didn't tell me what he was going to do with them, and I didn't ask him."

"I wish you'd find out what use he's making of the things."

"What for?"

"'Cause I want to know."

"I don't see how I'm going to do it."

"You might sneak around his house after dark and maybe you could see through a window what he's doing."

"I don't care to spy on anybody's private business."

"You're too particular," sneered Hooley.

"It isn't an honorable thing to do unless——"

"Unless what?"

"You have strong reasons to believe that a person is engaged in something that is decidedly crooked and against public interest."

"Maybe that's what Judson is up to."

"It is possible, but not probable."

"It's my opinion he's doing something he wants to keep secret."

"That's his privilege."

"Not if it's against the law."

"Then you imagine he's doing something crooked?"

Hooley rubbed his chin and then said:

"He may be."

"And your object in asking me to do the sneak act was to try and find out if he was doing something unlawful?"

"That's just it."

"You'll have to get somebody else to do it. I'm a poor sneak."

Billy got up and left the table.

When he returned to the shop the captain was sitting on a stool at the door, smoking his long-stemmed pipe.

The boy resumed his work on the pieces of steel.

"Say, Billy, look yonder," said the captain.

Billy looked.

Two men, with a pot of paste, were putting up some circus posters.

They were billing a small, one-ring show.

The central picture represented a big military mortar.

A clown was in the act of touching off the vent with a hot poker.

Through a hazy cloud of white smoke a figure in spangles, rolled up like a ball, with his head and heels together, was hurtling through the air just as if he had been fired from the mortar.

It was labeled, "The Great Cannon Act. The most astonishing and mysterious performance ever exhibited in public." Billy couldn't resist the inclination to go to the door to get a better look as soon as the billposters had finished their work.

"We must see that, Billy," said the captain.

"Sure," replied the boy, who had the prevalent weakness for a circus.

"Must be an astonishing performance," said the mariner.

"It's some fake. No live person would or could be fired out of a mortar that way," said Billy, who had good common sense.

"The bill shows him being fired out," said the captain.

"Those bills are always exaggerated. Last year, when the circus was here, one of the bills showed a giant about fifteen

foot high, who was on exhibition. I saw the giant, and he was only about seven feet tall, though he had a shako hat on that made him look almost ten feet. You mustn't put any stock in those bills."

At that moment Judson came along, with a well-dressed man.

"Got those pieces of steel finished yet?" he asked.

"Not quite. It will take me half an hour to file them."

"I'll be back in half an hour," and he went on to his house, which was only a short distance away.

As Judson failed to appear he thought he'd take them over to his house.

Billy entered the front yard, which was laid out as a garden, and walked up to the door.

As he was about to pull the bell he heard Judson's voice around the side of the house.

As he approached the corner he heard a strange voice say:

"When shall you have the machine in running order?"

"In a couple of days."

"Has the paper been delivered?"

"Yes. It's hidden under the floor in the cellar."

"Good! How long will it take you to turn out the goods after you get fairly started?"

"That will depend on circumstances."

"You'd better send them on to us in sections, by express, of course. Tackle the fives first, and when they're dry express them. Then follow with the tens, and wind up with the twenties. Keep a watchful eye out against curiously disposed people, and don't leave a thing around to tell tales when you're out of the house. Understand?"

"I do," said Judson.

The nature of the conversation had caused Billy to hesitate about showing himself, that is why he heard more than he otherwise would have.

He heard enough to more than half persuade him that some kind of an off-color business was going to be executed by Judson at the house.

The man was evidently finishing the assemblage of the parts of some kind of a machine—that is, putting the different parts together to make a complete whole—which, when ready, was designed to do some kind of work.

The fact that plates and paper were mentioned, gave Billy the notion that it was a printing press.

At any rate, he had learned a lot that was not intended for his ears, and he judged that it would be the part of prudence to return to the door and ring the bell.

This he did just as Judson and his companion appeared around the corner of the house.

"Hello! What are you doing here?" cried Judson, with an unpleasant look.

"I brought over those pieces of steel," replied Billy.

"Very well. Hand them to me. What's the damage?"

"I'll have to charge you a dollar."

"Here's the money, and half a dollar for yourself to pay you for fetching them over."

"I don't want any pay for that."

"Take it, anyway. You can take your girl to the circus on it," grinned Judson.

Billy accepted the tip and returned to the shop, not quite satisfied as to the legality of the business Judson was about to undertake.

CHAPTER III.

THE BURGLARS.

Although Hooley had asked Billy to find out what kind of a machine Judson was putting together, the boy did not intend to furnish him with the information he had accidentally come into possession of.

While he suspected that Judson was engaged in something that wouldn't stand the searchlight of investigation, he was not sure about it, consequently he did not think it prudent to tell any one what he had heard.

The captain was ruminating and smoking when he got back to the shop.

A man was waiting in the place with a horse to be shod, and Billy got about the work.

Then Dick came around full of the circus, some of the posters of which he had seen, which was to show in town Saturday afternoon and evening of that week.

"You're going to the circus Saturday, ain't you, Billy?" he asked.

"I guess so," said the young blacksmith.

"They've got some great acts this time. Look at that b across the road."

"I've seen it."

"That's a corker. I wouldn't miss seeing it for a farm."

"Do you think a man is fired out of a mortar like that picture?"

"Must be, or they wouldn't have the picture."

"Then you believe everything you see on a circus poster?"

"No-o. But they must have something like it."

"I daresay a man is shot out of the mortar, but it's by a spring and not by gunpowder."

"It wouldn't look natural if there wasn't a report and some smoke."

"Probably they have both, but I'll bet the mortar doesn't make them."

"Well, we'll go in the afternoon and see how they work it," said Dick, who was decidedly interested in the act, which the artist had illustrated with much realization.

At that juncture another horse appeared to be shod, and so Dick went over to talk to the captain, who was dozing in the sunshine.

Billy had just finished the job and got the pay for it when Mrs. Hooley appeared at the back door of the shop.

"Isn't John here?" she said.

"No. He hasn't been here since ten this morning," replied Billy.

"Then he's down at the dram-shop. You go there and tell him I want to see him right away."

"All right," said the young blacksmith, taking off his leather apron.

Telling the captain where he was going, he started off.

The tavern was two short blocks away.

Marching in, he saw Hooley seated at a table with two men.

He had a glass at his elbow and a pipe in his mouth, and he was riding his favorite hobby—the annihilation of all trusts and big business enterprises, and the equitable division of all the world's wealth.

Billy interrupted him to deliver his message.

"I'm busy," said Hooley, impatiently.

"Then I'll tell your wife that you won't come?" said the boy.

"No, you'll tell her I'll be there in five minutes."

Billy looked the two men over in a sweeping way, and mentally decided that he didn't fancy them.

They had smooth, hard faces, and their eyes were shifty.

One had a peculiar scar over his left eye which would identify him anywhere.

The other chap had a broken nose which marked him for life.

"Go on now," said Hooley, "and don't bother me."

"Is that your son?" Billy heard one of the men say as he walked away.

"No. He's my cousin's son, but he lives with me and works in my shop."

Hooley's five minutes were each five minutes long, and when he appeared at the cottage he caught Jessie from his better-half, but he expected that and never turned a hair.

Billy was shoeing his third horse of the afternoon and had no thought for Hooley, though he did think more than once of the two men he had seen in the tavern.

At six o'clock the boy closed up and went in to supper.

Then he went to his room to change his clothes.

Just before leaving his room he looked out of his window.

To his surprise he saw the momentary flash of a match through the back window of the shop.

He ran downstairs to see if Hooley had gone in there for something.

He found the blacksmith reading the evening paper, the captain smoking soberly in a corner, and Mrs. Hooley putting dishes away in the dresser.

Clearly, then, there must be some intruder in the shop, and he couldn't have got in there without forcing the back door.

Without saying anything he slipped out the back way just in time to see two men issue from the shop and shut the door.

They started around toward the road.

Billy followed them.

They stopped in front of the shop and one of them struck a match to light his pipe.

Both of their faces were revealed to the boy as he peered around the corner of the building.

He recognized the men as the two he had seen in Hooley's company at the dram-shop.

He wondered what had brought them to the shop, for they did not appear to have taken anything.

They must have had some purpose, Billy figured, as he watched them walk away.

Returning to the rear he found the door had been forced by some instrument.

The lock, which was a common one, was broken, so he had to get a piece of wood and nail it up, temporarily.

Then he went into the house and told Hooley about the incident, describing the two men so accurately that the blacksmith easily knew them.

He went out and looked at the door, asked Billy in which direction the men had gone, and then returned to his paper.

What he thought he did not say, and Billy, having a date that evening, hurried away to keep it, mentally satisfied that the two men in question were decidedly suspicious characters and ought to be kept track of.

Billy attended a dance that evening at a hall half a mile away and the affair did not break up till about one o'clock.

On his way home his course took him past the Carter mansion, which was situated in the midst of an extensive lawn, sprinkled with trees.

It was a handsome place, one of the most pretentious residences in the town, and stood on a corner.

The two street sides were closed in with a thick hedge, with iron gates—one of which was large and opened on the carriage drive.

As Billy hurried along he suddenly came upon the two men leaning against the big gate.

A swift glance told him they were the men who had been in the shop.

He could not see what business they had there at that hour of the night, and the more he thought about the matter the more he suspected they were up to mischief.

"I wouldn't be surprised but they are thinking of trying to rob the Carter place," he thought. "It's the best house in the neighborhood, and the one most likely to attract the eye of a burglar."

Instead of continuing on home, he turned up the next street, and crossing a vacant plot of ground, reached the rear of the Carter property.

Here the view of the residence was partly cut off by the barn, the stable and carriage-house, and the tool-house.

The fence was low and the boy easily got over it.

He made his way toward the back lawn and yard.

He was gliding forward under the shadow of the barn when he saw two figures come around the side of the mansion.

They went to the kitchen door and inspected it.

It was a plain iron door, which was closed and secured by an iron hook at night, the wooden door inside being also locked and bolted.

It would take tools and time to open the iron door from the outside.

The two kitchen windows were protected with iron shutters.

In fact, all the lower windows of the house were well protected except the small window that lighted the butler's pantry.

That, however, was high up and out of ordinary reach.

The window being small and bolted, it was not thought necessary to furnish it with a metal shutter.

The two men, whose intentions were now apparent, noted the small window, and decided that it offered the most available means of entering the house.

It happened that the gardener had used a short ladder on the lawn that day and had neglected to remove it from the tree against which it stood.

The rascals got the ladder, placed it in position against the butler's pantry, and one of them mounted to the window.

After failing to force the sash, he cut out a pane of the glass, stuck in his hand and drew the bolt.

To push in the window, which swung on hinges, was the work of a moment.

He flashed an electric searchlight inside, and then squeezed himself into the room.

His companion climbed the ladder and followed him in.

Billy had watched the proceedings and as soon as the men disappeared inside he walked around to the door communicating with the gardener's quarters on the second floor of the carriage-house, and rang the bell to arouse the man.

He had to ring it several times before he awakened the sleeper, who opened his window and asked who was there.

"It's me, Billy Blake. Dress yourself quick and come down. If you've got a revolver, fetch it."

"What's the trouble?"

"I'll tell you when you open the door. Hurry now."

Impressed by the boy's words that something was wrong, he hurried on his clothes, grabbed his pistol and came downstairs.

"There are two burglars in the house," said Billy. "They got

in through the window in the butler's pantry, with the help of a ladder that you left standing against a tree."

"How did you discover the rascals?" asked the gardener. "Never mind that now. We must try and catch them."

"I don't see how a man could get in through that small window."

"You see that it's open, don't you? And you see the ladder where it is?"

The gardener couldn't help seeing all that.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked. "Shall we wait here and catch them when they come out?"

"That would take too long. Give me your gun, I'll go in and you wait here to nab one of them if he should get away from me."

"Do you expect to face both of them?"

"Why not? I expect to catch them by surprise, and while I hold them at bay I shall make a noise loud enough to arouse the house and bring Mr. Carter on the scene, so that between us we'll capture the rascals."

"That will be first-rate if it works; but look out that the burglars don't take you by surprise and lay you out."

"If I don't come on them in the dark I'll surprise them all right," said Billy, confidently.

He mounted the ladder and looked in at the window.

All was dark and silent inside.

He struck a match and flashed it around, and finding that the coast was clear he got in, though not without as much difficulty as the burglars had experienced, for he was a husky boy for his age.

He took off his shoes and carrying them in one hand, and the revolver ready for business in the other, he started forward.

CHAPTER IV.

BILLY NABS THE CROOKS.

He entered the large kitchen first and passed through that into the lower hall or entry.

Here a short stairway led to the landing above.

This was the rear way of reaching the upper floors.

Billy decided not to go up that way.

He walked ahead to the front of the basement and listened at the first door he came to.

He heard no sounds, but he opened the door cautiously and looked in.

All was gloom in there and the place, which he guessed was the dining-room, was untenanted.

He closed the door and ascended the front basement stairs, which brought him to the main hall, where the parlor, library and conservatory were.

He expected to find the burglars busy on this floor, but an investigation of the rooms showed him they were not there.

Clearly, they had gone up to the second floor, where Mr. Carter and his wife slept, and where the private sitting-room was.

Billy started up, feeling almost like a burglar himself.

Suppose Mr. Carter was awakened and encountered him instead of the burglars, and put a bullet into him, it would be pretty rough.

So when the young blacksmith reached the landing of the second floor he stopped and listened intently.

Not a sound reached him from any room.

There were four doors within a short distance of each other.

Billy could see the outlines of two of them, as his eyes were now used to the deep gloom of the house.

He wondered why the Carters did not keep at least one light burning.

They did keep the lower hall jet, in a pink globe, turned low all night, but the burglars had extinguished it.

The boy had to make some move, so he tried the door of the front room, the sitting-room, where the family received their intimate friends.

The room was dark in all parts but one; that was where the wall safe lay.

The velvet curtains, which usually hid it, were now thrown back and the face of the safe was lighted up by the glare of a hand electric light in the hands of one of the burglars, while the other was drilling holes around the combination lock with an up-to-date hand-drill that went through the steel like an ordinary drill through wood and without making a sound.

The man who operated the machine was clearly an expert, for he hit the tumblers every time and they dropped out of position.

In a few minutes the contents of the safe would be at the mercy of the rascals.

"Stop, you rascals, and throw up your hands!" cried Billy, in a resolute tone.

Both men uttered ejaculations, and the fellow threw the light on the boy, blinding him with its intensity.

"A boy!" cried one of them.

"It's the blacksmith's kid," said the other. "He must be silenced."

Billy saw something coming at him and he instinctively raised his weapon and fired straight ahead.

The man uttered a cry and staggered back.

"I'm shot," he ejaculated, hoarsely. "Plug him, Cox."

Billy, realizing his peril, fired at the light.

There was a crash and the light went out.

The man uttered an oath and fired back just as Billy dropped, fearing such action on his part.

Billy, as blind as a bat from the effect of the light on his eyes, could not make out anything but the flash of the revolver.

Had the rascal rushed at him he wouldn't have seen him and couldn't have saved himself.

The fellow made the mistake of firing instead of dashing forward and finishing the blinded boy with a bullet, or the butt of his weapon.

Billy fired at the flash, and the bullet tore through the muscles of the man's right arm, by good luck, and caused him to drop his weapon.

The house was now aroused and everybody in it thrown into a state of great alarm.

Mr. Carter alone retained his presence of mind.

He seized his revolver and started for the sitting-room.

He noticed at once that the dim light on the landing had been put out by some one, and he lit it with the match he had in his fingers.

Then he heard a terrible uproar in the sitting-room.

He threw the door open and looked in.

He could make out nothing with his eyes, but he heard two persons on the floor near the door engaged in a desperate struggle.

He also heard groans coming from the vicinity of the safe.

He ran back to his room and got some matches.

He flashed one of these into the sitting-room and saw the two combatants rolling over and over on the floor, locked in each other's embrace.

One held a revolver, which he couldn't use, in his hand.

Mr. Carter lost no time in lighting the gas, and then he saw the state of affairs.

He couldn't tell the combatants apart, though he knew Billy well, because the boy was underneath and his face was hidden by the body of the broken-nosed man.

However, he saw that the burglar was a hard-looking stranger, so he seized him first and pulled him up.

Then he recognized the young blacksmith.

"Billy Blake—you here!" he exclaimed, in astonishment. "What does this mean?"

"Hold on to that man, Mr. Carter. He's a burglar," replied Billy.

With a sudden strong effort the boy released himself, grabbed the rascal, too, and shoved his gun into his face.

"Now will you give up?" he cried.

The man stopped struggling, for he saw that he had not the ghost of a show.

"You've got me. I give in," he said, sullenly.

"Put up your hands, then," said Billy.

The fellow obeyed.

"Get a towel, Mr. Carter, and tie him," said Billy.

A shawl-strap lay on the center-table, left there by Bessie, and Mr. Carter used it to tie the burglar's hands.

Then he looked at the groaning man.

"Did you shoot him, Billy?" he asked.

"I had to, sir."

Mr. Carter picked up the revolver belonging to the prisoner with the broken nose.

"They fired at you, too, eh?" said Mr. Carter.

"One shot, but it missed me. I fired twice. I hit this chap, I guess," he said, seeing the rip in the fellow's sleeve.

"Yes, you hit me, blame you!" hissed the man called Cox. "And you'll pay for it one of these days as sure as you stand there."

"I guess it will be a long time before you finish the time you'll get for this job. We've got you and your companion dead to rights," said Billy, not in the least worried by the man's threat.

An inspection of the other burglar's wound showed that he had been hit in the chest by the bullet, which had fractured a rib, glanced off and buried itself in a muscular tissue.

Mr. Carter went to his telephone and called up the station-house.

He stated what had taken place in his house, and asked that officers be sent to take charge of the prisoners.

His wife and daughter, who naturally had remained in the background in a state of anxious suspense, now learned all the facts of the case, and Bessie was loud in her praises of Billy's plucky efforts in their behalf.

The terrified women servants, who slept on the top floor, were reassured by the master of the house, and they retired to their rooms.

Billy went downstairs and admitted the gardener, and then he told Mr. Carter that he guessed he'd go home, as there was no longer any necessity for his presence in the house.

He had gone about a block when a patrol-wagon, with a bunch of policemen, came rushing in the direction of the Carter house.

It was close on to three when Billy got home.

When out late at night he never entered by the street door, because he did not carry the key to it.

He regarded a key as superfluous, because all he had to do was to climb up on the kitchen extension and let himself into the house through the window of the second floor landing, which was kept locked by a special contrivance he had invented himself.

He knew his name would be in the papers that day in the frustrated burglary, and he wondered what Hooley would say when he learned that the two men he had been on easy terms with at the tavern were burglars, and that he (Billy) had captured both of them in the Carter house.

He knew what the captain and Mrs. Hooley would say, and he had no doubt that his friend Dick would be fittingly astonished at what he had done.

He went to bed satisfied that he had done his duty as an embryo citizen, but more than all delighted at having been able to render a service to the Carters, with whom he wished to stand well, largely on Bessie's account.

CHAPTER V.

BILLY AND THE CANNON ACT.

The newspapers didn't have a line about the affair in the morning because they had gone to press, and the reporters had gone home, when the burglars were carried to the station-house and locked up.

Consequently, the first information the Hooleys got about it was when Billy told them at breakfast.

To say that his performance astonished them would be putting it mildly.

Billy left them talking about it and went to the shop to open up.

"I s'pose you'll have to attend the police court this morning?" said Hooley, who condescended to work that morning.

"I expect I will, but I won't go unless a policeman comes after me, for I've no idea when the men will be brought before the magistrate."

Dick came around about nine o'clock and then he learned about the burglary at the Carter house, and how Billy figured in it.

He thought at first that Billy was joking, and told him so, but the young blacksmith assured him there was no joke about it.

"Gee! but you're a dandy, all right!" said Dick, when Billy had finished his story. "You'll stand fine with Bessie and her folks."

A policeman came after Billy about eleven o'clock and took him to court.

There he found Mr. Carter and Bessie.

"Aren't you a plucky boy?" said the girl, beaming on him.

"I didn't do any more than was my duty," returned Billy, pleased at the way she addressed him.

"I don't believe many people would have done what you did," she answered. "At any rate, it isn't more than I would expect of you."

"Thank you for your good opinion, Miss Bessie."

"You're welcome, Billy. You may depend that we won't forget what we owe you."

The case was called, and Billy's testimony was enough to cause the magistrate to hold Cox for trial.

The other burglar was in the hospital, where his wound was not regarded as particularly serious, but it would be a week or ten days before he could be brought into court.

After the proceedings were concluded, Mr. Carter told Billy that he considered himself under great obligations to him for saving his property.

The safe held all of Mrs. Carter's jewels, the best of Bessie's and a solid silver dinner set, an heirloom in the family.

There were also other valuable articles in it.

Billy had saved it all, and the Carters were very grateful to him.

When Billy got back to the shop dinner was over, but Mrs. Hooley had his waiting for him in the oven.

He sat down and soon cleaned up the dishes.

Hooley was shoeing a horse when Billy went into the shop, and he worked through the afternoon without showing any disposition to go to the tavern.

As he appeared to be in good humor, Billy told him that he was going to the circus on the following afternoon.

Hooley offered no objection, though the boy's absence would keep him at work himself.

Apparently, the tavern had temporarily palled upon the blacksmith.

Dick met Billy next day right after dinner, or about half-past twelve, and the boys started for the circus lot.

There had been a procession through the town, which Dick had seen, but Billy hadn't, and the former described all its tinselled beauties to his companion.

When they reached the lot they found the tents all in place, and the circus people at dinner in one of them.

The main tent stood in a clearing partly surrounded with big elm trees.

Behind it was a long canvas shed where the working horses were tethered at one end, and the performing ones at the other, with a canvas wall between.

The wagons were drawn up outside, except those which carried the small menagerie, which were out of sight inside an addition to the main tent.

Another tent in front contained the sideshow, and this was already in action, the band of four blaring away on a platform outside to attract the dimes of the early comers.

The red ticket wagon, badly weather-stained, stood between the two tents.

It wasn't open for business yet.

The boys wandered around the clearing, taking everything in.

In some way they got separated, and while looking for Dick, who he knew couldn't be far away, Billy stopped to look at a circus pony that an attache was exercising.

Through the folds of the tent close by Billy heard men talking.

"Who in thunder will take Smith's place this afternoon?" one said.

"Why, get one of the attaches," said the other.

"I can't get one. The whole bunch are down on me because I got the manager to force them to put the mortar in position on the stage. They're sore on me for that, and not one will volunteer."

"See the manager. He'll pick one out and force him to act as the human missile."

"I'd rather not. I'm going to look for a volunteer on the outside to perform this afternoon and evening. I'll pay him \$10."

"I guess you'll have no trouble in getting a good-sized boy who'll jump at that money for doing an easy turn that doesn't take more than five minutes."

The voices ceased and one of the men came outside through a slit in the canvas.

His eyes rested on Billy, and the inspection was favorable.

"Want to earn \$10, my lad?" he said.

"Doing what?" asked the young blacksmith, curiously.

"Helping me with the cannon act."

"In what way?"

"My assistant, whom I shoot from the gun, has been taken ill and can't go on to-day. I'll give you \$10 to take his place. I'll furnish you with the spangled suit. It is a cinch."

"Before I accept I want to know if it's dangerous," said Billy, seized with a sudden desire to astonish all his friends whom he knew would be at the show either that afternoon or in the evening.

He knew his name would be in the afternoon papers in connection with the burglary, and it struck him that he would create a private sensation by adding another daring feat to his last night's achievement.

"Dangerous!" ejaculated the man. "Not in the least. It's perfectly simple. Come with me and I'll show you how the act is worked."

Delighted to learn some inside information about the circus, Billy followed him inside the tent.

Passing through a short canvas lane, they entered the main tent.

The big top was held up by the great pole which rose from the center of the ring, as in all old-fashioned, one-ring shows. The ring itself was a circular embankment of earth, which inclosed the space within which the performers went through their acts.

A double trapeze apparatus was suspended from braces on high, but the bars were now drawn up out of the way.

At the highest point of the tent, near the top of the pole, was fixed a roomy netting.

This, as was explained to Billy, was to catch the performer when he was shot from the mortar.

"You'll fall into it as lightly as a feather," said the man. "How does the cannon operate—with a spring?" asked the boy.

"Yes. The spring is a strong one and capable of firing a boy of your size a hundred feet. You see, it was built for a larger show, but I got hold of it at a bargain and had a machinist doctor it up to suit a small tent where a much lesser distance is covered by the flight of the human projectile. Come with me and I'll explain the mechanism."

He led Billy around in front of the circular seats for the public, to a small platform on which stood a formidable-looking mortar.

It was built of wood, however, with steel connections, and was painted black with gloss paint, to imitate the real article.

Anybody at a short distance away would have taken it for a real mortar.

"Look in and you'll see a big hunk of cotton-batting," said the man. "That covers the strong wooden top of the spring. You crouch down against that and its softness and elasticity breaks the shock of the spring. Being shot out of that isn't half as dangerous as being fired up through a star trap on the stage of a theater. You'll be thrown, with a graceful curve and without any effort at all on your part, into the net yonder."

"Suppose I should miss the net?" asked Billy, doubtfully. "You can't miss it. The spring operates with the same force each time. If you went through the act a hundred times you'd land in the same place."

"You are sure of that?" "I'm positive. My regular assistant has gone through the act sixty odd times this season and about 250 times last season. There never was a miss on his part."

"What are those notches on that quadrant?" asked Billy, pointing at a steel apparatus, like the quadrant in a locomotive cab, within the parallel lines of which a lever operated.

"They regulate the force of the spring," said the man. "The first notch is as far as the lever is drawn back in this show. That throws my assistant thirty-two feet into that net. In a larger and higher tent the lever would have to be pulled a notch lower, which would then send the projectile fifty feet."

"And suppose you pulled it all the way back. How far would that throw your assistant?" asked Billy.

"One hundred feet. It was built to throw that distance, and was originally used in a big, three-ring show, to throw a woman clear across the tent, where she landed in a big net," said the man.

"And she always went true?" said Billy. "As a die. The mechanical principle on which the spring operates makes it impossible for the projectile to deviate or fall short."

"Suppose the spring was to suddenly get out of order?"

"About one chance in a thousand."

"But that one chance is liable to happen."

"The majority of people have more than one chance in a thousand of meeting with an accident, but most of them miss it. Well, is it a bargain?"

"I'll risk it. It's like taking a dare."

"All right. The doors will open presently. Before they do I'll give you a rehearsal of the act. Take off your jacket and hat."

Billy did so, though he felt a bit nervous at undertaking a feat so new and practically mysterious to him.

"Say, how do you make the noise and smoke?" he asked.

"When I release the spring by pulling the trigger with this lanyard, a hammer flies over at the mouth of the cannon and strikes a charge of powder. It goes off with a report and a small cloud of smoke as you issue from the opening and soar upward. We'll omit that part at this rehearsal. The hammer will fly over, but will only give out a metallic sound. You'll go just the same. Now, get in, legs first. That's it. Crouch down. Hold your hands in front of your chest, like a diver, and throw them out when you are fired out. Understand?"

"Yes," said Billy. "Let her go!"

The man pulled the lever over to the first notch, attached the trigger and grabbed the line.

"All ready?" he said.

"Yes," answered the young blacksmith.

A shock, not over hard, followed and he went sailing through the air.

Before he knew where he was he dropped into the net as lightly as a feather.

"My! this is great!" he exclaimed to himself. "How will I get down?" he called to the operator.

Standing near the gun platform he saw two of the circus attaches watching him and laughing.

"You'll find a rope up there. Throw it out of the net and slide down," replied the man.

Billy did so, and alighted in the ring.

A piece of cord was attached to the center of the fancy rope, and the man told him to haul on the cord.

When he obeyed the rope rose up and settled at the corner of the net.

"How did it go?" laughed the man.

"Fine as silk!" replied Billy, delighted with his part in the act.

"Come with me to the dressing-room and don the suit I'll give you. You will appear about the middle of the bill," said the man, as they walked away.

CHAPTER VI.

BILLY CREATES A GREAT SENSATION.

In the meanwhile, Dick Hudson was looking everywhere for his missing friend Billy, and, of course, did not find him.

"Where in thunder did he go," Dick asked himself more than once, but he failed to get an answer to his question.

The ticket-wagon opened up, and the surging crowd began its clamor for the bits of pasteboard that admitted them to the big tent.

Reserved seats on the side near the band were sold for 35 cents; all the rest of the arena was a quarter; children, 15 cents.

The tent filled up rapidly, and Dick, fearing he would get left in the shuffle, got his ticket and, giving Billy up, entered the tent.

Among those who attended the afternoon show was Bessie Carter who came with her mother and several girl friends.

They took reserved seats but Dick sat opposite in the 25-cent section.

The band played selections to hold the growing audience in good humor and the second clown and other persons shouted photos, candy, peanuts and lemonade—the pink variety—for sale.

The audience talked, laughed, ate peanuts and candy, drank lemonade and waited in expectancy for the grand entree which opened the bill.

Back in the dressing-room the performers were getting into their costumes, and the head clown was making up his face.

In a corner Billy was wrestling with a suit of pink and spangled fleshings, with a blue trunk-piece that went about his loins, which also glittered with spangles in odd designs.

It was a new experience with him to encase his limbs in such material, and when he finally got the rig on he felt like a fish out of water, though conscious that he would look quite stunning to the young part of the audience.

He wondered if he would be taken with stage-fright when his turn came to make his bow before the packed house.

Already he began to feel a tingling of his nerves.

The performers passed out of the dressing-room and soon the band struck up the opening march and the show went on. Billy witnessed the different acts from a slit in the curtain. Suddenly a hand was laid on his shoulder.

He looked around and saw the cannon boss at his elbow.

"We go on next," he said. "When the band plays, 'There'll be a Hot Time in the Old Town To-night' that will be our cue to enter. I will go first and you will follow after."

"There'll be a hot time among my friends when they recognize me," grinned Billy.

The thought steadied his nerves and he determined to do the act in style.

The girl horseback rider finished her act amid a storm of applause.

As her mare trotted out of the ring the equestrienne kissed her fingers to the people and tripped after the animal.

A brief pause followed.

The ringmaster began telling the audience that the next feature would be the great cannon act, which had mystified

all the crowned heads of Europe, the nobility of every land, as well as the army artillery experts of all nations.

Millions of people had witnessed it with awe-struck eyes.

He said it was the most remarkable act on record—a human being actually fired from the inside of a big mortar in the presence of all.

The most stupendous thriller in the history of the circus.

He bowed himself out and the band started up the music cue.

"Come," said the cannon operator, and he ran out, followed by Billy. "Bow," he said, and Billy bowed in a bewildered way, amid a great clapping of hands.

They mounted the platform and there Billy gazed around on the big gathering, recognizing nobody, though two-score of his friends were present.

Two persons knew him at once—Dick and Bessie, and they were fairly struck dumb with amazement.

"Great Scott!" gasped Dick. "What does this mean?"

The cannon man waved his hand and Billy climbed into the mortar, the lever of which stood set at the first notch.

The two circus men who had watched Billy at his rehearsal were on the platform, dressed like artillerymen.

They were there merely for effect.

The detonating powder was in place and all was ready for the firing.

The audience had become silent, some with apprehension, but most with curiosity and expectation.

Suddenly one of the artillery chaps stepped up to the boss of the act.

He took him to the edge of the platform and pointing to the net asked him if it looked all right.

The other artilleryman stepped forward, grabbed the lever and pulled it down to the last notch and fixed the trigger as before.

Both artillerymen stepped back to their former stiff and soldierly attitudes.

"All ready?" cried the operator.

"Ready," replied Billy.

The man, without noticing that the lever had been changed to the 100-foot limit, pulled the trigger.

Bang! A puff of smoke, and a glittering object was propelled from the mouth of the mortar, like a shot.

Instead of curving gracefully into the net, Billy hit the top of the canvas, like a bullet.

Fortunately for his neck, the spot he landed against had been torn in the putting up and he went through the rent, like a bird escaping from its cage.

With the disappearance of Billy, the audience stopped applauding, for all seemed to understand that the human projectile was to be caught in the net, and instead of that he had gone through the top of the tent at a rate likely to carry him some distance up in the air.

There was a suspicion in the minds of the majority that something was wrong.

The actions of the cannon man seemed to confirm that impression.

He stood paralyzed on the platform.

The two artillerymen had jumped down and rushed out of the enclosure to see where the boy had alighted.

They had begun to realize that they had gone too far with their trick.

What if the boy was killed?

An investigation might fix the guilt on them.

Then they would be put in jail and perhaps hanged for murder.

A painful silence reigned in the tent.

Even the band remained mute.

Dick suddenly jumped up and started for the entrance.

His action was followed by others.

That made it certain to the rest of the audience that the cannon act had gone wrong.

Half the men rose and flocked to the exit.

The circus was thrown into confusion.

Almost a state of panic existed.

As fast as the crowd got outside they began looking for the human projectile, but failed to find the slightest trace of him.

Where had the glittering performer gone?

Billy had received a greater shock at the start than he was looking for after what he had felt during the rehearsal, and he went through the air so fast, tearing through the hole in the top of the tent, like an engine running wild, that he lost all idea of things till he landed with a crash among the upper branches of one of the surrounding elm trees. He was badly and scratched.

Instinctively he grasped the trunk for support and clung to it, like a drowning sailor to a plank in mid-ocean.

There, at a dizzy height, he hung until he recovered his presence of mind.

"Gosh!" he ejaculated. "Where am I at? This isn't the net. I'm up a tree, and a tall one at that."

That being no place for him in such an airy costume, he began to make his way down, but with care lest he fall.

Soon he made out the crowd surging about the circus-ground.

He began to wonder if the show had taken fire.

Everybody seemed to be excited.

Down he went till somebody happened to see him and uttered a shout:

"Here he is!—here he is!—in this tree!"

In a few minutes the tree was surrounded by a big crowd, and into their very midst Billy dropped, pretending to be as chipper as though nothing had happened to him.

The crowd gaped at him as he started for the tent.

He went in by the main entrance and the people followed as fast as they were able to push their way.

Billy walked into the ring, and then the women began clapping and waving their handkerchiefs.

The men and boys shouted as they rushed to the first seats in sight.

Billy bowed right and left with the greatest ease and non-chalance.

The band played joyfully and noisily, "There'll be a Hot Time," etc.

Then Billy ran lightly through the curtains and disappeared.

The amazed operator found him disrobing in the dressing-room.

"Great Scott, my lad, how did you escape with your life?" he said.

"I always light on my feet," grinned Billy. "What went wrong? Did the spring bust?"

"The spring! Impossible! Had it broken you would have been dumped into the ring, or at the most you would have alighted among the audience. Why, you must have been flung the full 100 feet. I can't understand how that could have happened, for I'll swear I set it for the usual 32 feet, the same as I did at the rehearsal," said the man, apparently greatly puzzled. "Such a thing never happened before."

"Well, it won't happen again—with me. Cough up \$5 of the \$10 you promised me and hunt up another human projectile for the night show," said Billy, who knew when he had enough of anything, even if it was a good thing.

"I'll pay you when I get my clothes on. I don't blame you for wanting to quit. It happened to be your hard luck to meet with the first accident I ever had with that machine."

"It wasn't any accident, Benson," said a voice behind them.

The man turned and found the circus chap he was talking to before he hired Billy.

"I saw the whole thing, but it was impossible for me to get close enough to you to warn you before you pulled the trigger," continued the man.

"Explain what you mean," said Benson, while Billy looked at him with interest.

"You remember that one of the attaches who pose as artillerymen took you to the edge of the platform and pointed at the net?"

"Yes, he asked me if it looked safe."

"That was a bluff to give his companion time to pull the lever back to the lowest notch."

"What!" roared Benson. "Do you mean to say that Jackson did that?"

"He did, for I saw him."

Benson uttered an imprecation.

"The manager must hear about it. Will you repeat what you have told me to him?"

"I will, for I think it was a rascally piece of business. If the boy hadn't been lucky he probably would have been killed. Suppose the canvas wasn't torn at the place he went through his neck would doubtless have been broken by the impact. Those chaps ought to be arrested and sent to prison."

"I'll see that they are," he fumed. "I thought it strange that an accident should happen to-day when I had a new hand. The chances were 1,000 to one against it. The scoundrels spoiled the act and shall suffer for it."

"The act wasn't spoiled. It was a tremendous success, for the people now believe the hole in the top was made on purpose for the boy to go through, and that the gun was aimed to send him into that tree where he alighted. They might have thought differently but for the plucky conduct of your young

man," and the speaker gave Billy an admiring look. "Instead of being rattled and looking like a ghost when he got down, he acted just as if the whole thing was cut and dried beforehand. He entered the tent, stood in the ring and bowed, smilingly, to the audience, and then made his exit just like a finished performer. The manager said you ought to keep him in Smith's place."

"Blake, you are a nervy chap, for fair," said Benson. "I wish you'd change your mind and repeat to-night."

"What! Repeat the 100-foot sail!" cried Billy.

"No, no; repeat the act. I'll guarantee the 100-foot mistake won't happen to you again."

"The temptation to make another tremendous success of the act might overcome you, Mr. Benson, and I wouldn't get off so easy. Lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place," said Billy.

"I'll give you my word, Blake," said Benson, eagerly. "You'll get a rousing reception to-night if you go on—a regular ovation. Think it over, will you?"

After some hesitation, and the promise of an extra \$5, which Benson said he'd get the manager to pay, Billy yielded to Benson's persuasions and consented to repeat the part of the human projectile that evening.

Then he went home to supper.

CHAPTER VII.

BILLY CLOSES HIS BRIEF ENGAGEMENT WITH THE CIRCUS.

Billy found Dick outside, looking for him.

"For the love of Mike, Billy, what induced you to go on in that cannon act?" cried Dick.

"A \$10 bill and the desire to give my friends who were present a delightful surprise," answered the young blacksmith.

"But I say you took desperate chances, being fired through the top of the tent. When I saw you pass the net and vanish, like a shot, I had an idea something was wrong, and I rushed outside, expecting to find you badly hurt. I found you had landed in one of those big trees outside, and as you came down and walked into the show without looking rattled, I came to the conclusion that everything was all right."

"Well, everything wasn't all right, Dick. I ought to have landed in the net."

"Then your going through the roof was an accident?"

"Yes. Did you see one of the two artillerymen pull back that lever?"

"Yes."

"You supposed it was part of the act?"

"Of course."

"It wasn't. The lever was already set right to fling me into the net. That rascal pulled the lever back to the 100-foot limit only used in a big circus. He wanted to give me an awful jolt and spoil the act. He might have killed me."

"Is that so?"

"It is. Both of those chaps will be in jail before dark if they haven't run away. I guess I made a big hit on account of the accident. I daresay everybody present thinks as you did till I undeceived you—that the ho'e in the tent was made on purpose for me to go through."

"I guess they do, but at first they had an idea that it was an accident. Say, you looked stunning in that spangled rig."

"Caught the girls, eh?" grinned Billy.

"So you got \$10 for doing the feat? How came you to be taken on? What was the matter with the regular chap?"

"He was taken suddenly sick, and Benson, who owns the act, hired me for the two shows."

"Are you going to do it again to-night?"

"Yes, for \$5 extra, but Benson will see that I land in the net the next time, just as I did at the rehearsal I had."

"You've got a pretty good nerve. How does it feel to be thrown 100 feet into a tree?"

"I don't remember anything after the shock of the spring until I crashed into the tree."

"It's a spring that threw you?"

"Sure. What else?"

"It must be a powerful one."

"Believe me, it is. Say, how would you like to try the 32-foot sail into the net? If you want to sample it I'll get Benson to treat you to it before the show opens to-night."

"No, thanks. I'm not a bird."

"It feels fine. It would be something for you to talk about."

"That's an honor I won't try to deprive you of."

"I thought you had some nerve, Dick?"

"It doesn't extend to mechanical cannons that have the power of throwing you a hundred feet. I think you're foolish to run a second risk."

"Maybe I am, but I'm going to chance it. Benson says I'm bound to get an ovation to-night, for my afternoon feat will be known all over town by dark."

"So you're after an ovation? Why don't you join the show?"

"I wouldn't mind if I got paid at the rate of \$5 a performance, which would be \$10 a day."

"Wouldn't you get that right along?"

"I should say not. I asked Benson what wages Smith got, and he said \$15 a week and his keep. Besides doing the cannon act he has to ride in the procession, rain or shine; also appear in the grand entree on horseback; hold a hoop and a banner in the ring when the lady equestrian is on; help pack and unpack the mortar; put up the stage on which it rests and take it down again; assist in feeding the trained ponies and horses three times a day and do about fifty other things."

"He doesn't do much for \$15 and his grub, does he?"

"Benson told me enough about circus life to show me that there is more of real hard work about it with most of the people than glitter and show. I'd rather stay home and work in the shop than tackle it for small pay."

"I thought circus people had a picnic."

"Don't you believe it. Even the star performers have to put in the best part of six days and nights, but there are no stars in one-ring shows, and no fancy salaries. Since I've been behind the scenes I've got a different idea of the circus to what I had."

They had reached the shop by this time.

Hooley was closing up, for supper was nearly ready and he hadn't done anything for an hour.

Billy went into the house and told Mrs. Hooley and the captain about the show, but said nothing about the part he had unexpectedly taken in it.

He learned that the blacksmith, his wife and the skipper were going to attend that evening, and he grinned at the thought of them recognizing him as the human projectile in the cannon act.

As Billy was not required to be on hand before nine o'clock, he took his time in getting to the lot.

Hooley, his wife and the captain started at quarter past seven.

They found Billy and Dick talking outside the gate.

"We've got the key so you needn't wait up to let us in," said Mrs. Hooley to Billy.

The boy grinned and nodded and went on talking with his friend.

About eight, the lads walked to the circus lot.

The big top looked like a glowing mushroom, and the side-show also glowed with its own lights.

"I've got a pass for two for the side-show. Come on in," said Billy.

The regular show had commenced, so that the side-show was not crowded to any alarming extent.

Six curiosities of the ordinary kind were on exhibition—a fat woman, a living skeleton, a Circassian lady, a midget, a sword-swallower and fire-eater, and a female snake charmer. In addition there was an Egyptian fortune-teller and palmist.

Also half a dozen penny-in-the-slot phonograph boxes, and two others showing pictures.

There was an added attraction in the shape of a five-legged calf, and it cost a penny extra to see it.

The boys spent twenty minutes in the side-show, then Billy led his friend to the "stage entrance" and they passed into the dressing-room.

Billy opened a small trunk and took out his costume.

After getting into it he put his clothes in the trunk.

The lads then took up a position at the curtain and watched the acts and the audience till the band played the music cue for Benson and Billy to enter.

The young blacksmith got a rousing reception as he stood at the edge of the platform and bowed.

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Hooley, in some astonishment. "That boy looks like a twin brother of Billy. Did you ever see such a resemblance, John?"

Both Hooley and the captain admitted that the resemblance was most remarkable.

Billy, as he got into the mortar, saw that the machine was set for 32 feet, and he noticed that Benson kept his eye on it. A couple of different attaches were acting as the artillerymen.

The guilty pair had got wind that they were to be arrested and had cleared out of town in a hurry.

This time the feat went off all right, and Billy landed in the net.

He slid down the rope, bowed and made his exit.

As soon as he had got into his clothes Benson handed him \$5 and an order on the ticket-wagon for \$10 more, which he duly collected.

The boys hung around the show till it was nearly over and then went home.

When the Hooleys and the captain returned he was in bed and asleep.

Mrs. Hooley entered his room to compare his face with the memory she carried of the human projectile's astonishing resemblance to him.

"My, my, I never saw two people so much alike," she thought as she flashed the lamp on Billy's sleeping face. "It is wonderful."

The captain, who had a suspicion of the truth, met her as she was coming out.

"Is he in his room, Maria?" he asked.

"Yes, and fast asleep."

The skipper rubbed his nose reflectively, stared at Billy's door and then went to his own room.

"It's funny," he mused. "I've heard of two people looking exactly alike, but the circus chap had a ring just like the one I gave Billy, and that ring was made specially for me. It ain't like any ring that's sold in stores."

He scratched his chin and reflected again.

"Billy went to the show this afternoon. It's funny that he never said anything about the chap that looked the image of him. It isn't like Billy to let such a thing slip. I must talk to him in the morning."

With that resolve in his mind the skipper turned in for the night.

CHAPTER VIII.

A RASCALLY TRICK.

The captain was a habitual early riser and was usually the first down in the morning.

It was his duty to start the fire going in the stove by opening the draughts and shaking it up, then he went to the well and drew a pailful of water, for the town's water-pipes did not extend to the houses in that vicinity, though the water company contemplated broadening their system in the near future.

On the following morning, which was Sunday, Captain Gale was up at seven, attended to his duties and then getting the paper from the stoop, sat down to read it.

A scare heading on the front page first attracted his attention.

"Almost a tragedy. A thrilling incident at the circus yesterday afternoon not down on the bills. Thrown a hundred feet into a tree. The human projectile of the cannon act has a narrow escape from death."

The captain was interested at once, and as he read the particulars his eyes bulged when he saw Billy's name printed as the boy who had had the narrow escape.

The story explained that Gunner Benson's assistant, having been taken sick, Billy had been engaged to take his place during the afternoon and evening shows.

Then it went on to state all the facts of the case, as the reader knows them, winding up with the information that the rascally jokers had made good their escape as soon as they learned they had been found out.

"And Billy never said a word about the matter," muttered the captain, putting down the paper. "So it was him we saw instead of a boy we took for his double. Well, well, well, what a boy he is! When my sister learns the truth she'll have a conniption fit. Haw! haw! haw!"

The captain chuckled loudly, and then resumed the reading of the paper.

At breakfast Billy remarked the odd look the captain favored him with.

"Billy," said Mrs. Hooley, "you were at the circus yesterday afternoon and you never told us about the boy who looked enough like you to be your twin brother."

"What boy do you mean, Aunt Maria?" asked Billy, who called Mrs. Hooley aunt.

"What boy do I mean?" exclaimed the lady, who thought the question superfluous. "Why, the one who was shot out of the cannon and landed in the net, of course."

"Oh! Why, that was me," replied Billy, with an innocent expression.

"You!" ejaculated Mrs. Hooley, in amazement.

"Yes. The boy who does the act was taken sick and the boss of the cannon act offered me \$19 to take his place. It was an easy way to make a golden eagle and so I accepted."

"Do you mean to say that it was you we saw dressed up in

spangled tights, and who was applauded by the audience when he came in?"

"Yes, ma'am," replied Billy, demurely.

"Well!" she exclaimed, clearly very much astonished.

Hooley had eyed the boy sharply since he made the admission.

"Did you get the money?" he said.

"I did."

The captain grinned broadly.

"Your name is in the paper this morning, Billy," he said.

"It was in the papers yesterday afternoon in connection with the robbery," said Billy.

"This morning there is a story about you taking a 100-foot flight into a tree outside the circus tent," said the skipper.

"Oh, that was nothing," grinned the boy. "The gun went off at full cock by mistake and I went a little further than I was intended I should."

"The paper says you might have lost your life through the accident."

"That isn't any dream, cap'n; but all's well that ends well you know."

"What are you talking about?" asked Mrs. Hooley.

"An accident that happened to me during the afternoon show," said Billy.

"An accident! What was it?"

Billy explained and Mrs. Hooley was astonished for the second time.

"You never said a word about it when you came home, nor did you tell us that you were engaged at the circus," said the lady. "Why didn't you?"

"I wanted to treat you to a surprise."

Billy, having finished his breakfast, got up and left the table.

When Billy went to Sunday School that morning, with Dick, they met Bessie Carter at the door of the church basement entrance.

Of course, the young lady had something to say about Billy's remarkable performance at the circus the afternoon previous which she and her mother had witnessed.

In fact, the young blacksmith had to tell his story over again to an audience of his friends, though most of them had read about it in the morning's paper.

He was generally looked upon as a kind of hero, who had already distinguished himself by catching two midnight burglars, and all the young people regarded him in a new and more favorable light.

After the services Billy escorted Bessie home, and during the walk he learned that she had entered Black Bess in the principal event of the race meeting which filled in the last three days of the ensuing week.

A \$1,000 purse had been offered by the proprietors of the track to the horse which won the two heats out of three in the running race open to all horses under three years old.

Entries closed Wednesday night and the race was to form the closing event of the three days' meet on Saturday.

Already two well-known racers had been entered, with records that seemed to leave Black Bess' chances in the shade.

Bessie, however, was confident that her mare, with no official record, had a good chance to carry off the purse, and she was very enthusiastic over it.

The race track was situated within a short distance of Hooley's shop, and the week promised to be a busy and profitable one for him.

"Want a job?" asked Billy of Dick, when that lad appeared on Monday morning.

"What doing?" asked Dick.

"The superintendent of the rack track is looking for a boy to remember the thirty odd stables on the ground. I told him I'd send you around to see him. He said he'd pay \$1. He'll supply the paint, brushes and a step-ladder."

"I'll take it. Where will I find him?"

"At his office at the track. Get over there now or you might miss the contract."

Dick, eager to earn a dollar, started off.

The horses that were to take part in the meet began arriving that day, and several of them were brought to Hooley's shop to be re-shod.

That, with their regular work, kept the blacksmith and Billy constantly busy up to Wednesday night.

A big crowd attended the opening day on Thursday, and the program furnished was such a good one that the success of the race meeting appeared to be assured.

The biggest interest, however, centered about the closing

event on Saturday—the one-mile running race, best two heats in three, for the \$1,000 purse.

The fact that a local horse, Bessie Carter's Black Bess, had been entered in competition with two well-known racers, had been made much of by the local press, and had aroused a lively interest.

None of the racing people expected the black mare to win even one heat, but as the officers of the track association and the attaches of the track had seen and some of them had timed Black Bess with the girl on her back over the course, they let it be known that the racers opposed to her would by no means have a walkover, but would have to hustle to win over the mare that had no official record.

The owners of the rival horses heard all the talk about Black Bess.

They put it down as country buncombe until they learned the time she had repeatedly made over the course with her mistress on her back.

Then they got together and talked the matter over between themselves.

The result was a business talk with their respective jockies. The rival horses were, of course, not only daily exercised on the course, but were sent over it and timed by their owners at daylight on two mornings.

In each case they fell a little behind their best records, and they had little, if anything, on the black mare.

The men then inquired about the jockey who would ride Black Bess, but his identity appeared to be a secret.

The mare appeared daily on the track in the morning, and the owners and jockies of the rival racers had every opportunity to look her over and note the way she worked under pull, with her mistress riding her.

They wondered why the jockey wasn't in charge of the animal, for it was considered a prime necessity that horse and rider should get acquainted before the contest.

Mr. Carter finally gave out that he had specially engaged a well-known Eastern jockey to ride Black Bess, and was looking for him to show up.

This jockey was a crack rider and noted for his successes. The announcement made the rival owners look serious.

They had good reason to fear that with Nick Burnside on Black Bess, with her private record for speed, there was an even show of them losing, and it galled both men to think they were in danger from a horse without an official standing.

Burnside appeared on Friday, having been delayed by special business.

He took the mare in hand at once, and that evening, just as the shades of night were falling, in the presence of Mr. Carter and his daughter, he speeded the mare around the course at a record clip.

In spite of the efforts made to keep this trial shady, one of the rival jockies got wind of it, sneaked into a position to time the trial, and reported the results to his employer.

The owner looked more than serious when he heard it, for it was better than anything his animal had ever accomplished.

If Black Bess could make the same time at the race, next day, she was bound to win, and the chances were she would make it with Burnside riding her, for he could get everything out of a horse there was in one.

The owner hurried to the hotel where his own rival was stopping and told him the news.

Although pitted against each other, they were both against any other competitor.

A consultation followed.

They decided that some means must be taken to keep the black mare out of the race, and they were not over-scrupulous as to the means employed to achieve their object.

Black Bess was not stabled at the track like the other horses, as Bessie Carter wouldn't allow it.

The rule requiring it had been suspended by the track proprietors in order to get her to enter the mare, for they knew she would be a big attraction.

On Saturday morning, about nine o'clock, Black Bess appeared at Hooley's shop in charge of the gardener and Bessie herself.

Billy was alone at the time, and was doing nothing at the moment.

Burnside had ordered her to be re-shod with an inside cork sole, which he had fetched with him to add to her springiness.

Bessie handed Billy the cork layers, which he was to fit to the mare's hoofs, and gave him careful directions to follow, then she went down the street to see a friend, leaving the gardener at the shop.

Billy started upon his task, and the gardener sat outside the door in the sun.

The young blacksmith was just finishing his work when four strangers appeared.

While one of them entered into conversation with the gardener the others walked into the shop.

The three visitors, taking advantage of the fact that Billy's back was turned toward them, tried to carry out the nefarious purpose which had brought them to the place—namely, to dope the black mare.

While one grabbed her head and the second her mane, the third tried to force a soft, round ball into her mouth.

Black Bess resented the attentions of the strangers at once. The animal kicked and Billy turned around in time to detect their game.

"What are you up to?" he cried, angrily.

Dropping the mare's foot he sprang at the rascals.

The trio started for the door in a hurry.

The boy had a red-hot horseshoe in the tongs in his hand.

One of them stumbled and fell, but managed to evade Billy and reach the door in time to make his escape with his companions.

At that moment Captain Gale had stumped into the shop through the back door.

"What's the trouble, Billy?" asked the skipper.

"Why, those scoundrels came in here to do up Black Bess," replied the boy. "Look at that pill," he added, picking the bolus up. "The old game of dope. I wish I had caught one of them, he'd have gone to jail in double-quick time."

At this point the gardener looked in at the door.

"Say, I thought Miss Bessie left you here to keep your eye on Bess," said the young blacksmith, angrily.

"So she did," answered the man.

"Well, you've been doing it in fine style, I don't think. Why didn't you come inside with those men and keep them away from the mare? They came here to dope her and were within an ace of doing it. If anything had happened to her I'd have been blamed for it as well as you. You stay here now and watch her."

Then Billy finished his job and soon afterward Bessie Carter came back.

He told her what had happened, handed her the bolus to show her jockey, and told her the mare had had a lucky escape.

Bessie was quite staggered by the incident, and she said some pretty sharp things to the gardener, who had not a word to say in his own defense.

"I thank you, Billy, for saving the mare," she said, gratefully.

"Don't thank me, Miss Bessie. The mare saved herself. She kicked and backed, and that drew my attention to the rascals. Then I went for them."

"Well, you helped save her and I'm very grateful to you, Billy," said the girl, with a look that made the boy's blood tingle.

CHAPTER IX.

A THRILLING RACE.

There was a big crowd at the fair-ground track that afternoon.

It seemed as if everybody in town was there.

Hooley was there with several boon companions, Billy was there with his friend Dick, and Captain Ezra Gale was there with his inseparable pipe.

Necessarily, the shop had been locked up.

A good program for this, the last day, was on the books, but nobody cared particularly about the minor events, though they bet on them just the same.

Public expectation was on the qui vive over the \$1,000 running race.

This was to be pulled off in three sections, with another attraction sandwiched between the heats, to give the three horses entered a chance to rest up.

The local papers had printed a good deal about Black Bess' performances, and confidently asserted that, ridden by such a noted jockey as Nick Burnside, she had an excellent chance to beat out the two racers pitted against her.

At three o'clock the horses came out for their preliminary canter, and the eyes of every one rested on the black mare. She had never looked handsomer or fitter for a gruelling run.

Her limbs worked with perfect motion, and the owners of the other two horses watched her with undisguised anxiety.

At the last moment they had pooled their interests against her.

The jockeys had received their instructions to this effect—in the first heat Sinecure was to win if possible, while the jockey of Mosquito was to try and impede Black Bess in every way short of fouling her.

This program was to be reversed in the second heat.

If the racers won a heat each the jockeys were free to make their best efforts to win the third one without reference to the black mare.

With an ordinary jockey on Black Bess the chances would have been in favor of the racers under this arrangement, but against so clever a strategist as Nick Burnside it was doubtful if the scheme would work.

However, the owners felt that it had to be put through.

The horses were lined up, the bell tapped and they were off, amid the greatest excitement.

The man holding the flag dropped it as they passed him in a bunch and the heat was on.

At the quarter-mile post Sinecure moved ahead, with Mosquito second by half a length.

All three were going like the wind, but any one who knew Burnside's methods could understand from the way he sat that he was holding the mare in to some extent.

At the half-mile Sinecure led by a length, the others maintaining the same relative positions.

There was hardly any change at the three-quarter pole, and everybody counted Sinecure a sure winner of the heat.

As the horses came down the home-stretch in rattling style, with Mosquito crowding the black mare as much as the jockey dared, Burnside suddenly bent forward and let Black Bess out.

She slipped past Mosquito as though the latter was standing still, caught quickly up with Sinecure and passed under the string a full length ahead.

The yell that went up baffles description.

The owners of the racers swore to themselves, and cursed Burnside for his winning tactics.

Billy and Dick fell all over themselves with joy, while the captain swallowed a mouthful of smoke and had a coughing fit.

As for Bessie, who sat with her father and mother in the grandstand, she fairly went wild with excitement and happiness.

Bessie and her father hurried to the paddock to congratulate Burnside and to fondle the mare.

Everybody was so excited over the finish that they paid little attention to the intervening event.

The owners of the racers consulted with two of their friends, the men who, with two others, had tried to hocus the mare at the blacksmith shop that morning, and the rascals presently went away, intent on some fresh mischief as a last desperate resource.

In due time the three runners were lined up for the second heat.

The crowd now considered that Black Bess, under Burnside, was a sure winner.

They were no longer anxious when at the half-mile post the mare was a length and a half behind, with Sinecure leading as before and Mosquito a good second.

They looked for another exciting finish.

But it didn't come.

Sinecure won by half a length, with Mosquito second and Black Bess, apparently doing her best, three lengths in the rear.

There was hardly any shouting now.

Everybody was disappointed, and showed it.

Experienced horsemen in the stand who knew Burnside saw there was something wrong.

There was a suspicion that he had thrown the heat, either because he felt confident of winning the final, or for ulterior motives.

Bessie Carter was wild and her father angry.

When they reached the paddock to demand an explanation of Burnside they found the jockey reeling in the saddle.

His eyes looked fishy, and it was clear he was not himself.

As he attempted to dismount he fell headlong on the ground and lay there like a log.

A doctor was summoned and he pronounced the man drugged.

With this evidence of foul play, Mr. Carter sought the managers of the track and registered a protest.

They took the matter under consideration and an investigation was begun.

The rumor of the truth spread among the crowd and a howl of indignation arose.

Billy and Dick heard it and they were mad as two fighting cocks.

"It's a blamed outrage!" cried Billy. "That heat ought to be declared off and run over again."

"That's what it ought," coincided Dick.

"This is the second piece of crooked work that has been pulled off against the mare," said Billy. "You can't tell me that the owners of the other horses are not indirectly concerned in it. They intend to win somehow, and they don't care how. The papers shall hear about the attempt to dope the mare in my shop, and then the whole town will know why things have happened to handicap the local favorite."

In the meantime the betting had swung around stronger to Sinecure.

The bookmakers got wind of the fact that Burnside was down and out and could not ride in the final heat.

They immediately offered fancy odds against Black Bess, which lots of people, ignorant of the real truth, took up.

When Mr. Carter learned from the doctor that Burnside would not be able to ride again that day he was in a quandary.

There were several jockeys offered him in good faith by other owners, but none of them knew how to handle the black mare, and they were pretty certain to lose against Sinecure, try their best.

Mr. Carter explained the situation to his daughter.

The judges had decided the second heat a go, from lack of proof to show that the owners of the racers had had any hand in Burnside's knockout.

It was generally believed that professional bettors were implicated in the foul deed, and an effort was being made to discover the guilty persons.

Bessie was crying with disappointment and indignation.

Suddenly she seized her father by the arm.

"We'll win yet!" she cried, her eyes blazing with sudden excitement.

"How can we?" said Mr. Carter.

"I'll ride Bess in the last heat," she said.

"You!" he exclaimed, in astonishment.

"Yes. Why not? She's my horse. I've a right to ride her."

Her father shook his head.

"It wouldn't be allowed. It wouldn't be legal. If you were permitted the owners of the racers would protest, and their protest would go."

"Father, suppose I put on Mr. Burnside's suit. He's just my size and build."

"But you will be recognized as a girl."

"Leave that to me, father. Get me the clothes and then give out that our stable boy, Sam, is going to ride Bess in the last heat."

"Are you crazy, child? Sam is a negro."

"I intend to black up and deceive the crowd. I'll take the clothes across the road to Mrs. Thornton's, and after dressing I'll black up with a cork and a candle. Hurry now, there is no time to be lost."

"But, Bessie—" protested Mr. Carter.

"Do as I tell you, father," said the girl, in a resolute tone. "It is our only show to win, and win I will or kill Black Bess!"

Her desperate earnestness compelled compliance on her father's part, and the jockey's suit and colors were soon in her arms.

With them she quietly slipped out of the park and across to her friend's house, where she proceeded to get ready for the most thrilling event of her young life.

In the meantime, Mr. Carter gave out that he had sent for his stable boy to ride the mare.

This, he said, would occasion a short delay, but it could not be helped.

The owners of the racers made no objection when they heard about it.

They now felt certain of winning, and put up all their funds on Sinecure, for that horse was regarded as the only one in the race, the owner of Mosquito compromising a victory on his part for the money he expected to win on Sinecure.

At last the horses appeared on the track for the last heat, and everybody saw what appeared to be a smiling young negro on Black Bess.

The crowd was rather doubtful as to his ability to win, but they put up their money on the long odds that were now offered.

The bell tapped and the three racers got away to an even start.

Sinecure forged ahead, but it was soon seen that Black Bess was under a pull, just as she had been managed by Burnside.

The pace was set by the foremost jockey, and it was a hot one.

At the quarter Black Bess was two lengths behind.

The owners of Sinecure and Mosquito shook hands and considered it was all over but the shouting.

There was no change at the half-way mark, but at the three-quarter pole the Black mare had pulled up a length.

The jockey riding Mosquito then began crowding her as they struck the home-stretch.

The black boy didn't understand this tactic, but he knew that he was losing ground.

He knew he must pass Mosquito at once or lose the race. He bent forward and gave the mare a free rein.

"Go, Bess! go, that's a good girl!" he cried, in a musical voice that sounded strange from the lips of a negro boy.

The mare recognized the voice and she sprang ahead like a streak of light, lapping Sinecure's flank.

The head jockey woke up, looked around and saw Black Bess crawling up, like a meteor.

He uttered a yell and applied the whip to Sinecure.

The racer responded and opened up a gap, but Black Bess was now urged to her best speed and she got down to business in fine style.

The finish promised to be a close one, and the crowd went wild with excitement.

Foot by foot the black mare crawled up on the racer, who was doing his best.

Neck-and-neck they came down the last part of the course.

Then, with the wire right ahead, the negro rose half up, bent over the mare's neck and gave her one stinging clip with the whip.

Black Bess shot ahead with a rush, her nostrils dilated and her mouth agape, and passed the line half a length ahead.

CHAPTER X.

THE COUNTERFEITERS.

A perfect pandemonium ensued around the grandstand.

The Davenporters yelled themselves hoarse.

Not only had the local horse won the race, but they had won their bets placed at long odds.

Every bookmaker was badly hit by Black Bess' victory, and they lost all of their anticipated profits of the meeting, and more on top of it.

As for the owner of Sinecure, not to speak of the owner of Mosquito, he was a wild man.

He had not only lost the purse of \$1,000, but a big fat roll as well.

They were both out their expenses, likewise, and their friends were cleaned out down to their last dollar.

What the bunch didn't feel like doing isn't worth mentioning.

When the mare passed the line a winner, Billy and Dick fell into each other's arms and then executed an Indian war-dance around the captain.

They flung their hats in the air and yelled like a pair of Comanches.

Neither had bet on the result, for they were not betting boys, but they were just as happy as though they had won a million.

"My gracious! I never thought Sam could ride Bess like that," said Billy, who had not recognized the cheat.

"Why, he did as well as Burnside did in the first heat," said Dick.

"I think he had a harder job of it. The first heat was merely a trial of capacity—a kind of sizing up of form for what was to come. The last heat was real business, especially at the finish. Sam is a cookee, but he looked small to me in that jockey suit," said Billy.

"He certainly did," agreed Dick. "Let's try and get in the paddock."

They found the paddock jammed with a mob which surrounded Black Bess, who was in charge of the gardener.

The supposed Sam had quickly dismounted and disappeared.

Mr. Carter was there, and the boys, when they managed to squeeze in, were surprised not to see Bessie there, too.

It wasn't like her to be absent under the circumstances. The black mare was led away to cool off and the crowd, after congratulating Mr. Carter, hurried away to collect their winnings.

Everybody agreed that it was the greatest race ever pulled off in Davenport, and nobody could complain that he hadn't got his money's worth of excitement.

The race course was pretty well emptied by the time Bessie appeared to see about getting her mare home.

"I'm awfully glad your mare won, Miss Bessie," said Billy, when he met her.

"I'm awfully glad myself that she won," she replied, with sparkling eyes.

"Sam is a corking rider. I didn't think it was in him," said Billy.

"You think he did well, then?" she said, her eyes brimming with laughter.

"Well, I should say he did! He couldn't have ridden better had he been a regular jockey. What are you going to give him for winning the purse for you?"

"I'll take care of him," she laughed.

"Where did he go after the mare got back to the paddock? The people were looking for him. They wanted to give him a ride on their shoulders. They say the townfolk have won a raft of money on Black Bess. Most of the bets went at ten to one and even better against her. The bookies must feel sore," and Billy grinned.

Sunday morning's papers printed full and graphic stories of the big race, stating that in spite of the foul play that had put Nick Burnside out of the running, Black Bess had won, being ridden in the last heat by Mr. Carter's negro stable boy, Sam Johnson, whose performance was distinctly noteworthy.

So Sam became famous in Davenport for a feat he had not performed.

A brand-new suit of clothes, a \$10 bill and the realization of his importance as an alleged jockey, induced Sam to keep Bessie's secret, and he sported around town like a conquering hero.

His colored friends regarded him with admiring eyes, and he took full advantage of his fictitious plumage.

Nobody, not even Billy, dreamed that it was Bessie, in disguise, who had won her own race, and it was well that no suspicion of the truth leaked out, for a protest doubtless would have been put in by the disappointed owners of the rival racers.

With the race meeting a thing of the past, and the \$1,000 purse banked in Bessie's name, things resumed their normal status in Davenport.

Billy had forgotten all about Judson and his presumed printing machine, owing to the circus episode and the race meeting, but now that there was nothing particular to occupy his thoughts the appearance of that individual with a stoutly wrapped package under his arm, bound for the express office, recalled the conversation to the lad which he overheard that day in the garden of Judson's house.

He began to feel a curiosity to know what kind of secret printing the man was turning out.

He spoke to Dick about it, and after securing his promise to let the matter go no further, told him what he had overheard.

"He's got paper which he's going to use to turn out fives, tens and twenties," said Billy. "Now I can't imagine what is meant by fives, tens and twenties."

Dick couldn't throw any light on the meaning of the terms, either.

They puzzled their heads over them, but could reach no satisfactory conclusion.

That evening Dick sneaked across the road and entered Judson's garden.

He hung around the house awhile, and distinctly heard a steady thumping as of a press of some kind in operation.

He located the sounds as coming from the cellar, but not a ray of light came from the windows that in the daytime admitted light to that part of the house.

He examined two of the windows and saw that they were covered on the inside with some kind of thick cloth.

It was clear that Judson did not mean that any prowler about the premises should discover what he was doing.

Dick spent half an hour in a vain attempt to find an eye-hole somewhere, and finally had to give it up and go home.

Next day he reported to Billy what he had been guilty of, and his non-success.

The boys talked the matter over again with as little result as before.

About eight o'clock that night Billy let himself into Judson's garden to see if he could hear the machine Dick had listened to.

He listened in vain, for no sound at all came from the cellar.

He tried every one of the cellar windows and found them fast.

He looked the house all over, but not a light shone from any of the windows.

"I'm not making out as well as Dick did," he thought. "I must try another night and then perhaps I'll hear the machine. After all, what'll I gain by hearing it? That won't give

any line on what Judson is doing. On the whole, I don't think I have any right to play the spy on his actions. It isn't any business of mine if he's up to some kind of shady work, though if I was sure about it I might deem it my duty to notify the authorities."

Billy started to return home when he heard the front gate slam shut, and then voices in conversation reached his ears.

Fearing discovery, which would place him in an awkward predicament, he crouched down in the shadow of the water-butt, close to the kitchen.

He judged that the persons were Judson and a companion, and he expected they would enter the house by the front door.

But they didn't.

They came around to the back of the house, passing within arm's length of the young blacksmith.

He saw that one of the pair was Judson.

"I sent off the package of fives three days ago by express. Rigby must have got it by this time. The bills are beauties, and are sure to pass current anywhere. I'm at work on the tens now. They are turning out equally good. We should make a barrel of money out of this thing before the government gets wind of our exertions to increase the currency of the country for our individual profit," said Judson.

The speaker's words, "increase the currency of the country," gave Billy the clew he was after.

It indicated that Judson was printing counterfeit paper money in his cellar, and that was a crime of the first magnitude.

The boy no longer felt that he was acting a part in any way dishonorable.

In his opinion, it was his duty to learn all he could concerning the crooked work that was being carried on in those premises and then notify the town authorities.

With that idea in view, Billy listened eagerly to the talk of the two men.

"I'm glad things are turning out so well," said the stranger. "We are taking great chances in this game. I shall advise Rigby not to circulate a note until all the bills shall have been printed and the plant here dismantled."

"I gave him the same advice when he was down here two weeks ago, before I had things started. The fewer chances we take the better. The moment the banks report to the Treasury Department that one or more new counterfeit issues are in circulation the Secret Service men will be put on the job. Probably the first thing they'll do will be to try and locate the plant that turned the notes out, and are presumably turning them out right along. If the plant is out of business, the plates buried in some secret spot, and nothing left to show where the notes originated, the government sleuths will be at fault, and while they are up a tree we'll have the chance to work off all the money and then withdraw to Canada, or Mexico, and make our way to Europe, where we can enjoy life without fear of being dogged from pillar to post."

"I agree with you, Judson. You've a good head. The way you got the machine down here in parts, and then put it together, proves to us that we made no mistake in taking you in with us," said the man, whose name was Stockbridge.

"Taking it apart and putting it together again was nothing out of the usual for me to do. I am a thoroughly practical machinist, you know. The changes I made in its construction have greatly improved it. I could sell the ideas to the manufacturers, I've no doubt, but with larger game in sight I can't bother with such small matters as that."

"You are certainly a clever fellow," said the other, approvingly. "Well, let's go in. I'd like to see you run some of those fives off."

Judson started to unlock the kitchen door, which was fitted with a Yale lock for greater safety, when his alert ears heard a suspicious sound behind the rain-water barrel.

The risks attending the enterprise he was engaged in kept him constantly keyed up, and the least thing out of the way attracted his notice.

To the surprise of his companion, he made a sudden dart for the water-barrel.

Billy hadn't the ghost of a show to make his escape.

Judson, with an exclamation of anger, seized the boy and yanked him out of his place of concealment.

"Who are you, and what are you doing behind that water-butt?" he demanded.

"I'm Billy Blake, if you want to know, and I was hiding there so you wouldn't catch me," replied the boy, frankly.

"Billy Blake! Hookey's boy, eh? What brings you here?"

"I was just looking around."

"What for?"

"I heard your machine was in operation and I was curious to discover what use you were making of it."

Judson uttered an imprecation.

"How did you learn I had any machine, and what business is it of yours what I was doing with it?"

"I guessed you had some kind of a machine, because I fixed up certain parts of it for you, and though it's none of my business what you are doing with it, I thought I'd find out, anyhow."

"Well, what have you found out?"

"Nothing much about the machine, because you've got your cellar windows nailed up and covered on the inside with cloth."

"What has the cellar got to do with the machine?"

"You've got it down there, haven't you?"

"Who told you it was down there?"

"Anybody listening last night could have heard it running."

"Then you were nosing around here last night, too, eh?"

"I didn't say I was."

"I guess you were, all right. Were you hidden behind that water-butt all the time my friend and I have been here?"

"I was."

"And you heard all we said?"

"I admit that I did."

"Then you know what I'm doing with the machine?"

"You're printing bogus money," said Billy, boldly.

This frank admission threw the two men into a panic.

"What's your price for keeping your mouth shut about what you've learned?"

"My silence is not for sale where there is anything crooked concerned."

"Then you mean to blow on us?" almost hissed Judson.

"It's my duty to expose a counterfeiting game."

"I see. What are we going to do, Stockbridge?"

"We can't let him go till we decide what action we are to take," replied his companion.

"Of course we can't. Open the door and I'll bring him inside. You've put your foot in it, young man, and as I don't propose to go to the penitentiary on your account I think you will have to decide between silence or death."

With those words, spoken in a tone of determined meaning, Judson shoved Billy into the house, and Stockbridge locked and bolted the door after himself.

CHAPTER XI.

HOW BILLY WAS SILENCED.

Billy was marched down into the dark cellar, pushed into a wooden compartment used for the storage of wood and locked in with a stout hasp and wooden plug.

In a few minutes the cellar was lighted up by a reflector-lamp, which threw a strong light on the press, at present covered with a piece of oiled cloth.

There were a couple of chairs near a common deal kitchen table, and Judson, pointing at one of them, told his companion to be seated.

They then proceeded to converse together in low, earnest tones, and it is needless to say that the subject they were discussing was Billy, and how they were to prevent him from exposing the business in hand.

Billy could see them through a crack in the wooden wall of his prison, but he couldn't hear a word they said.

The men talked for some time.

The problem they had to solve was a hard one.

The boy's frank replies to Judson's questions outside had shown him to be a lad of pluck, and not easily intimidated.

He lived only a stone's throw away, and the men were uncertain whether any one in his home knew of his visit to the Judson house or not.

Their position, however, was a desperate one, and Judson, who was a man of resolution, insisted that only a desperate course could be pursued to silence the boy, who had practically refused to be bought off.

It was decided to make another effort to bribe him, but in the event of its failure, Judson said they must be prepared to act as the case called for.

"But we can't kill the boy," protested Stockbridge.

"Are you willing to go to the penitentiary for the best part of your remaining days? You know what the penalty is for counterfeiting government money. We cannot withdraw from the scheme now and save ourselves. We are all three in the same boat. I have printed and sent to Rigby 10,000 \$5 notes from the plate stolen from the Treasury Department. I have

already under way 10,000 \$10 notes, which I have printed from the second plate. I have the paper under the flooring for the printing of 10,000 \$20 notes—\$350,000 altogether. That's a fortune divided between us three. Nothing but that curious boy stands between us and the realization of our hopes. It isn't our fault that he has butted into our affairs. I have taken every possible precaution to avoid suspicion. The curiosity of that young blacksmith has defeated me. I know what Rigby would do if he were here. He's a man of action in an emergency. So am I when it comes to the pinch. Well, it's come to the pinch with us, Stockbridge. I say if that boy hasn't sense enough to accept a bribe for his silence he must die!" said Judson.

"He might accept it to save his life, and then squeal the moment he got out of our power," said the other.

"No, I believe he'd keep his word if he passed it. He strikes me as that kind of a boy. At any rate, I'd take chances on it."

Stockbridge shrugged his shoulders, doubtfully.

"If we couldn't trust him we'd have to put him out of the way without losing any time offering him a compromise," said Judson. "As you're opposed to that, what are you going to do about it? Have you anything to suggest?"

"We could dose him with knockout drops; that would keep him unconscious for perhaps twelve hours, and while he was dead to the world we could take the press apart, pack it for shipment, with the rest of the stuff, to some other place, and begin anew in another locality," said Stockbridge.

"Yes, we could do that, but we'd be traced after he got free and notified the authorities," said Judson. "There is no way under the sun that we could hoodwink the Secret Service people once they got wind of this enterprise. Our safety up to this moment lies in the fact that no suspicion exists at Washington that a counterfeiting plant is in operation. My idea, as I told you, was to finish the printing and bury the plant somewhere before we put a single note out. As the case stands now we must quit where we are, with most of the tens and all of the twenties lost to us, at least for a long time, unless we can make a deal with the boy or silence him for good."

"We're in a bad box," said Stockbridge.

"We could hardly be worse, except in the hands of the detectives."

"What proposition are you going to make him?"

"One thousand dollars cash."

"It's a lot of money for a boy. He'd be a fool to refuse it. What good can it do him to blow on us? If I were in his shoes I'd take the money and saw wood."

"Most boys would take it, hide it away from the knowledge of their folks and spend it having a good time, but that chap is different from most boys. I think our only chance with him is to convince him that he must choose between death or silence and a thousand dollars. The most honorable boy values his life above all else in the world. At least that is my opinion."

"Well, try him," said Stockbridge.

Judson took a revolver out of the drawer of the table and, rising, went to the place where Billy was confined.

He opened the door and told the boy to step out.

"Young man," Judson said, when Billy came out, "do you see this revolver?"

"I do," replied Billy.

"Very well. Remember, I have it and don't try to cut up with us. My friend and I have talked the case over and we have decided to offer you \$1,000 in good money for your silence. If you refuse this excellent proposition we will be compelled to put you out of the way. We are not bloodthirsty enough to be anxious to cut your career short. We had rather not do it, but you see if you refuse to compromise we have either got to sacrifice everything and go to prison for probably twenty years or settle you. Twenty years in the penitentiary would mean the blotting out of the best part of our lives if we survived the term. You are a comparative stranger to us. Can we sacrifice ourselves for you? Well, hardly. You see how the case stands. What's your answer? Weigh your decision well, for your life hangs on it."

"The only compromise I'm willing to make with you is this: I don't want your money, and you can't buy my silence. I will agree, however, to give you a chance to escape the penalty of your crime. Shut up shop here, destroy your press, the notes you have printed and the paper you have on the premises intended for bills—do this, under my inspection, and you can go your way unmolested. I will forget that you have ever been here. I think that is a fair offer on my part. It's the only offer, anyway, I'll make," said Billy.

"You forget that we are making the terms, not you," said Judson, harshly.

"Your terms I can't accept."

"Are you tired of life?"

"No; but there is something I value as much as my life, and that is a clear conscience. It isn't in me to compromise with rascality. I was born that way and can't help it," said Billy.

"Then you refuse our offer?"

"I do."

Judson pushed Billy back into the woodbin and locked him in again.

Then he returned to the table.

"You heard his decision," he said to Stockbridge.

The man nodded.

"Well, he's got to die. That's all there is to it."

"It's murder, and I'm opposed to it."

"I'm not stuck on killing him, but I see no way out of it."

"We could take him away to some place and keep him prisoner until you finish the printing."

"Where could we take him where he would be safe? Would you agree to watch him for two or three weeks?"

"I'd do anything to avoid discovery and the consequences of it."

"Where would you take him?"

"I've got an idea," said Stockbridge, suddenly.

"What is it?"

"Sixteen miles from here there is a private madhouse, kept by a certain Doctor Jackley, whom I have heard is not over-scrupulous about taking in patients if he is well paid for their keep. We'll dope the boy and then I'll hire an auto and take him there to-night. A good round bribe will induce the doctor to keep the boy for a month, at any rate. Inside of that time you can finish up the printing, get rid of your paraphernalia and the three of us will be able to work off a considerable quantity of the bills. We'll drop them between here and the Pacific Coast, and try and plant the balance in San Francisco. Then we'll take a steamer for Australia and work our way around to Europe. What do you think about it?"

"We'll do that. There will be no need of killing the boy, and in a month he'll be set at liberty. I guess we'd better make his term at the madhouse six weeks to provide against any slip in our program. We can't very well dope him, as he wouldn't drink anything we offered him, so we'll tie him to a chair and then chloroform him. I've got some in the house. That will put him to sleep long enough for you to carry out your plan," said Judson.

The matter being decided, Judson placed a chair near the woodbin.

Billy was told to come out.

"We're going to tie you up for the night," said Judson, "and give you till the morning to come to terms with us."

The two men then pushed the young blacksmith into the chair and tied him in an easy way with a rope around his body and arms.

Then Judson went upstairs and got the chloroform.

He saturated a cloth with it and when he went back to the cellar he threw it over the boy's face.

Billy, suspecting that they really intended to kill him, put up a desperate but useless struggle.

In a few minutes he lay unconscious.

An hour later he was lifted into a waiting auto and driven away by Stockbridge.

It was close to midnight when the machine reached the madhouse.

Stockbridge rang for admission, and after some delay the man in charge of the gate appeared and demanded his business.

"I must see Doctor Jackley at once. I have a patient for him who must be taken in to-night," said Stockbridge.

The man said he'd have to see the doctor.

In the end the auto was admitted and the counterfeiter interviewed the proprietor of the establishment.

For a bribe of \$1,000—\$250 down and the balance in three instalments, the doctor agreed to keep Billy in the institution for six weeks, at the end of which time the boy was to be drugged, carried to a certain town and left to his own resources.

Stockbridge paid the first money and took his departure as Billy was carried into the building.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PRIVATE MADHOUSE.

When Billy recovered his senses he found himself in bed in a small room, the furniture of which consisted of the

cot he was on, one chair, a washstand made of heavy wire, holding a metallic bowl and pitcher, a soap-dish and a small towel, and a small looking-glass above a shelf holding a comb and brush.

The early sunlight was shining through a narrow window protected on the outside with iron bars, like a prison cell.

Billy was astonished at his strange surroundings.

His first impression was that he was a prisoner in an upper room of the Judson house, though he did not remember that any window of the house was provided with iron bars.

He jumped out of bed and went to the window.

There he was greeted with another surprise.

He was on the third floor of a building surrounded by a high stone wall topped with sharp spikes, and the landscape was strange to him.

Clearly, he had been carried off from the Judson house, and from Davenport, to a house in some locality he was unacquainted with.

He tried the door of the room and found it was secured on the other side.

"I'm a prisoner all right," he muttered. "Those chaps intend to hold on to me until they complete their rascally work and are ready to skip, then probably I'll be released when they feel safe in letting me go. I wonder how long that will be? And I wonder how far from Davenport I am?"

As Billy could find no answer to his questions, he proceeded to dress himself.

Then he sat down by the window and looked down at the grounds inside of the wall, at the walls and at the country around about.

His room faced the rear prospect, and the space between the building and the wall had the appearance of a well-kept yard.

The presence of the spiked wall puzzled the boy not a little. Taken in connection with the barred window, it looked something like a jail, or perhaps a institution of some kind.

While the young blacksmith was ruminating on his predicament his door was unlocked and a rough-looking man entered with a tray containing his breakfast—a bowl of oatmeal and milk, a small piece of steak, two small corn-cakes and a cup of coffee.

The man put the tray down on the bed and motioned that Billy was to eat.

"That's my breakfast, eh?" said the boy. "I'm ready for it; but, I say, what place is this, and by what right am I confined here?"

The man made no answer, but turned about and left the room, locking the door after him.

Billy ate his meal and in a short time the man came after the dishes.

The boy tried to get the fellow to talk, but he wouldn't, and so he continued in the dark concerning his surroundings.

As soon as he was left alone again Billy hoisted his window and got a more extended view of the place, as far as the bars permitted him to do.

He saw a railroad train in the distance, also a glimpse of a winding country road.

He could make out several farmhouses, and saw field-hands at work.

By and by his ears were saluted with a medley of strange sounds proceeding from a room below.

The house seemed to be well populated.

After awhile he heard a noise against one of the walls of his room.

It sounded like sawing.

He listened and was sure somebody was at work on the wall.

There was a fall of plaster and the sound suddenly ceased for awhile, when it was resumed again.

There came the sound of footsteps in the corridor outside his door.

The noise on the wall stopped altogether.

His door was thrown open and Dr. Jackley with an attendant entered the room.

He looked at Billy with critical attention.

"So you're the Mayor of Chicago?" he said.

"What's that? What are you talking about? Who are you, anyway?" asked Billy.

"Quite mad—quite mad!" said the doctor, shaking his head.

"Who's mad?"

"Let me feel your pulse. I'm a doctor. I want to see what your condition is this morning."

"Don't you worry about my condition, it's all right. Perhaps you'll tell me where I am?"

"You're at your summer residence in the country, mayor."

"What's the matter with me?" Billy asked, adopting a new line of talk in the hope of drawing his visitor out.

"You are afflicted with softening of the brain," replied the doctor.

"Oh, I am?"

"You are. You imagine that you are the Mayor of Chicago."

"I do?"

"And that you own half of the city. The consequence is that your friends have brought you here to be treated."

His words gave the boy a shock.

He had read about madhouses and always had a horror of them.

"Is this really a madhouse?" he said, earnestly.

"It is."

"Who is the proprietor of it?"

"I am."

"I thought you said you were a doctor?"

"So I am. I am a specialist on diseases of the brain."

"Then you ought to know that I'm pretty far from being a lunatic."

"You have been properly committed to my care on a certificate signed by several well-known Chicago physicians. I couldn't lawfully accept you as a patient here without such a certificate."

Dr. Jackley's statement was, of course, a lie.

"If such a certificate was handed to you when I was brought here it was forged by the rascals who want me kept out of the way. You had better investigate it and you'll find there's nothing in it. My name is William Blake, and I live in Davenport, with a distant relative named John Hooley, a blacksmith. If you send to him you'll soon find that I never was in Chicago in my life, and that I am no more crazy than you are yourself," said Billy.

The doctor smiled, indulgently.

"I was told that you would tell me all this," he said. "That is another phase of your malady. One day you imagine you're the Mayor of Chicago, and on the next you insist that you are a blacksmith. On the third you claim to be a circus performer who is fired from the cannon at the performances. Another of your illusions is that you are a Secret Service detective, and have discovered a counterfeiting plant in a house near where you have lived. You see, my young friend, I have a full history of your malady. Your friends have brought you to the right place to have you cured, if you can be cured. I shall keep you under observation and examine you daily. If you are tractable and give me no trouble, I shall have great hopes of effecting a cure in you within six weeks, in which case you will be discharged and returned to your friends. If you behave violently and give us a lot of trouble you will have to be placed in a strait-jacket in a padded cell in the dark and fed on bread and water till you are calmed down. I am not sure you understand what I am saying to you, but you look as if this was one of your lucid moments, so I have gone to the trouble of explaining matters. If you behave yourself I shall take it as a favorable sign. You will be well fed, allowed a book to read if you wish so, and occasionally permitted to exercise yourself under the eyes of one of my keepers in the garden below. Then in six weeks——"

"I see," said Billy, "you have been paid to keep me here for six weeks so that the rascals who fetched me here can complete their crooked work and make their escape? I think before the six weeks get around my friends will be able to trace me, and then you'll have to explain why you, a specialist in brain troubles, accepted me, a perfectly sane boy, as a lunatic afflicted with softening of the brain."

The doctor smiled.

"The certificate is my authority for taking you in," he said. "But I have told you it is forged. It is up to you to investigate it."

"I never investigate certificates signed by reputable physicians."

"How do you know that the names signed to it are those of reputable doctors?"

"I have other certificates from them in my safe."

Thus speaking, the doctor walked out, the door was locked, and Billy was alone once more.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MAN WITH THE RED BEARD.

Billy was a shrewd lad, and he easily saw through Dr. Jackley's significant talk.

"I'll make it hot for this doctor when I get out," the boy muttered. "I will tell the authorities of Davenport that I was kept here so as to give the counterfeiters time to complete the printing of their money and clear out in safety, and I guess the government will handle this doctor without gloves."

While he was thinking the matter over he heard the noise on the wall again.

He wondered what was the meaning of it.

It looked to him as if some person was cutting an opening through the wall into his room, no doubt from a room beyond.

The noise ceased again when an attendant appeared with a look for Billy to pass the time with, but it was resumed when he man went away and the corridor was once more silent. In about half an hour the plaster suddenly gave way in chunks.

An instrument in the hands of some person out of sight rapidly widened the hole until it was large enough for a small man to crawl through.

Then a head, with a bushy red beard, appeared through the opening and looked around the room.

Billy's eyes and those of the intruder's met.

"Well, who are you, and what did you make that hole for?" asked the boy.

"I thought this room was empty. When were you brought here? I've never seen you before," said the man.

"I was brought here last night. I suppose you're a patient, too?"

"I am."

"You don't talk like a crazy man. Why should you be kept here against your will?"

"You're not crazy yourself. I can see that. Why are you put up here against your will?"

"Because I fell into the power of a couple of rascals whose wicked work I got wind of. To prevent me from exposing them they drugged me last night and then brought me here to remain for a matter of six weeks if I can't manage to make my escape before that time."

"I was put here to force me to divulge a secret."

"A secret?" said Billy.

"Yes. The secret of a buried treasure which I discovered. But I'll never do it. I'll die and rot here first," said the man, with desperate earnestness.

When the man mentioned that he held the secret of a buried treasure, Billy, for the first time, began to entertain a suspicion of his sanity.

In his opinion buried treasures existed only in the pages of story-books.

Therefore, he hadn't much faith in buried treasures.

"So you know the secret of a buried treasure, do you?" said Billy, skeptically.

"I do."

"What does it amount to?"

"Nearly \$100,000 in gold."

"That's a lot of money. So you were confined in this place because you would not tell certain people where it is hidden?"

"That's it."

"When you found they had the bulge on you why didn't you offer to compromise?"

"Because the money is all mine and they have no right to a dollar of it."

"Did they offer to compromise?"

"Yes. They agreed to set me at liberty if I would give them half of it."

"I should think you would have taken them up. Half of that money, with freedom, is better than none of it and captivity."

"They wouldn't have kept faith with me. They wouldn't let me go until I told them first, then I know they would have kept me here anyway till I died."

"It seems to me you're in a bad predicament."

"I have made several attempts to escape, all of which have been failures. This room has been vacant for two weeks. I decided to bore my way into it, expecting to find the door unlocked. Then I intended to lie in wait for the keeper who comes up here at stated times. My plan was to knock him out, dress myself in his clothes and then make my escape from the building and grounds," said the man. "Now that you are here the door, of course, is locked and my plans are a failure."

"Maybe not. I want to escape as much as you do. Perhaps we can overcome the keeper together," said Billy.

The man with the red beard was desperate enough to undertake anything that promised success, so he crawled through the hole and sat down on the bed to await the coming of the keeper.

"Say, how came you to find a treasure of \$100,000, and why didn't you take possession of it at the time you found it?" said Billy, more to engage the man in conversation than because he believed in the treasure.

The man said that he and two cousins went shooting one season three years previous on the northern shores of the State of Wisconsin.

He got separated from the others one afternoon and found the treasure concealed in a hollow tree.

He opened one bag and found it contained \$20 gold-pieces, with a memorandum of the amount hidden in the tree.

He marked the location of the tree very carefully and returned to camp with the one bag, which he showed to his cousins.

He foolishly said there were many more bags where he found that.

Their cupidity was excited and they wanted him to divide the treasure in three equal parts.

He refused to do that, and after that they watched him so closely that he dared not revisit the tree.

He determined to do it later by himself, and the party returned home.

Before he had made his arrangements to go after the treasure his cousins drugged him one night and brought him to the madhouse, where he had been ever since.

They told him he would remain here till he died unless he told them exactly where the treasure was.

Such was the story of the man with the red beard, who said his name was Barnum, and he told it so straight that Billy came to believe him.

"If you help me to escape, my lad," he said, "we will both go to the place where the treasure is and I will give you half of it. That will be a fortune for you, and half of it is enough for me. Then I shall have my cousins arrested and punished. They are guilty of a crime that will send them both to prison for many years, and so I will have revenge on them."

At that moment there was the sound of footsteps in the corridor.

"There's the keeper," said Barnum. "Now try and get him to open the door."

He glided into the corner, and Billy pushed the bed against the wall to hide the hole.

The young blacksmith pounded on the door and then went back to the window.

Presently a wicket was raised and the keeper peered into the room.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want you to bring me some drinking-water," said Billy.

"Drink out of your pitcher," said the keeper.

"I tried to, but it's rotten. Bring me some decent water."

The man went away without saying whether he would do so or not.

In a little while he came back and peered in through the wicket.

Seeing the boy still sitting by the window he ventured to unlock the door.

He opened it far enough to push in a small pitcher.

Before he could close it the man with the red beard grabbed the handle and pulled it open.

With a blow of his fist he stretched the crouching keeper senseless on the floor.

Then he dragged him into the room.

"Now to escape!" he said.

"How can we do it in broad daylight?" said Billy.

"We'll manage it somehow."

In the man's hip-pocket was a loaded revolver.

"You take this and fight your way to the back gate. I'll pretend to be in chase of you, for with this fellow's clothes on I'll be taken for a keeper. Thus we may get outside the wall. Once outside I defy any man to bring me back. With the revolver we can keep the others at bay and make our escape."

While he was speaking he was taking the keeper's clothes off.

He put them on himself, with the man's hat.

Then they both tied the half-dressed keeper and gagged him with pieces of the sheet and the towel.

Barnum opened the door and looked out.

The corridor was deserted.

"Come," he said, "it's a good time to make the effort for liberty. All the other keepers are watching the patients in the garden."

He stepped out of the room and Billy followed him, locking the keeper in.

CHAPTER XIV.

CONCLUSION.

Billy and the man with the red beard slipped over to the stairway and looked down.

As far as they could see there was no one on the floor below, which was the second, so they went down.

"You go ahead. Remember, I'm supposed to be following you. There is a door at the back of the ground floor leading into the yard. It is probably not locked at this time of the day. Make for the back gate where the supplies are taken in. You will find it locked and barred, and the key is in the possession of the yard-man. Watch your chance and with a stick or stone hit the bell over the gate and then hide. That will bring the yard-man to the gate. When he opens it rush upon him and knock him down. I will keep watch from the back door. When I see you dash out I will start after you and chase you down the lane. Use the revolver if necessary."

Thus spoke Barnum.

Then Billy descended the stairs, followed by his companion.

With the weapon ready for action Billy glided to the back door, found it unlocked, opened it and looked out into the yard.

A broom stood against the house.

He took it and walked over to the gate.

With a dexterous swing he rang the bell and then hid behind an outhouse.

The jangle of the bell fetched the yard-man.

He unbarred and unlocked the gate.

When Barnum saw the boy dash at the man he rushed forward to help him if necessary.

Billy, however, struck the man down with the butt of his revolver and ran outside.

Barnum rushed after him as if in chase.

The cook saw part of the incident and hastened to give the alarm.

By the time a second keeper joined in the chase the fugitives had reached the road.

Billy ran on, followed by Barnum at a little distance.

He made no effort to overtake the boy until they struck a turn in the road.

Then they continued their flight abreast.

"We had better cut across the field," said Barnum, "for the doctor is bound to send his auto with several keepers, and they would easily overtake us if we kept to the road."

Accordingly, they took to the field and kept on till they reached a cross-road that in due time carried them into the village of Bingham.

Inquiry developed that they were fourteen miles from Davenport.

They got lunch at a bake-shop and then walked five miles to a trolley line which went to Davenport.

When they reached that town they went directly to police headquarters, where Billy told his story.

A patrol-wagon and several officers, with Billy and Barnum, drove to the Judson house, passing the blacksmith shop en route.

The house was surrounded, the back door smashed in and the party entered.

Judson and Stockbridge were found at work in the cellar.

They put up a fight and wounded two of the policemen before they were captured.

The evidence of their counterfeiting business was very apparent, and the police took possession of everything but the press.

The Treasury Department officials were notified, and sent men on to look into the case and take charge of the prisoners and the paraphernalia of the business.

In the meanwhile Billy went home and took Barnum with him.

His story created something of a sensation in the family. It also created a big sensation in town when the particulars were printed in the afternoon papers.

At Billy's request Barnum was invited to stay at the house for a few days.

The government officers arrived and heard Billy's story.

They complimented him on his activity against the counterfeiters, and assured him that he would be suitably rewarded.

At the end of a week Billy and Barnum went off together.

The supposition was that the boy went to spend a couple of weeks at the home of the man with the red beard.

Barnum, however, was unmarried and had boarded before he was carried to the madhouse.

He had a bank account at one of the banks in the town of

Chester, where he formerly lived and where his cousins had their business.

His money remained awaiting his order.

The first thing he did was to cause the arrest of his cousins. They were released under heavy bail.

While waiting for the grand jury to consider the case, Billy and Barnum hired an auto and started for the localities where the treasure was hidden.

They made a pleasure trip of it, and finally reached the unsettled part of the State.

Providing themselves with a store of provisions, they started on the last stage of their journey.

Barnum found it no easy matter to locate the place where he and his cousins had camped at the time he discovered the treasure, but they found it at last.

There they left the auto and proceeded on foot to hunt for the hollow tree.

"Do you think you can remember the location of the treasure, Mr. Barnum?" asked Billy. "It is three years since you were here before."

"Yes, if the landmarks haven't been wiped out in the meanwhile," replied the man with the red beard.

The tree, Barnum said, was close to the shore of Lake Superior, and its gnarled dead trunk bore a peculiar shape very different from any other tree in its vicinity.

"Do you see that island yonder?" he said.

"Yes."

"You notice two tall chimney-like rocks on it?"

"I do."

"We must bring those two rocks in line so they will appear as one rock, then we will be close to the treasure-tree."

It was an easy matter to get the two tall rocks in line.

When they did Barnum walked straight forward, counting his steps.

At the fortieth step he stopped and began looking for the stake he had driven there.

Billy's sharp eyes soon found it.

Turning direct to the left, Barnum counted off thirty feet and there, right before them, stood the fantastic-shaped dead tree, which the man declared looked just as it did three years before.

An inspection of its interior revealed nine bags of money, each containing \$10,000 in gold, or \$90,000 in all.

They carried them to the automobile in two trips.

Then they made a fire and cooked a pot of coffee, and opened their basket of provisions made a very good meal.

Having successfully achieved the object of their journey, they started on their return to Chester.

The gold was deposited in Barnum's bank and he drew \$45,000 in bills and passed the money over to Billy, thus keeping his agreement to divide the treasure evenly with the boy who had helped him to escape from the madhouse.

The complaint made to the authorities by Billy and Barnum led to the breaking up of Dr. Jackley's establishment and the freeing of thirty odd perfectly sane persons who had been kept there for varying lengths of time.

The stories told by these people as to the cause of their imprisonment resulted in the prosecution of a number of well-known persons, and the righting of divers wrongs.

Billy returned to Davenport in time to appear against two burglars, who were convicted and sent to prison for four years each, and also to testify against the two counterfeiters.

The latter rascals got a long term each, and shortly after their conviction the Treasury Department forwarded a check for \$10,000 to Billy Blake as a reward for his services in the case.

Mr. Carter gave Billy a valuable present in testimony of his appreciation of the boy's grit, and at his suggestion the young blacksmith quit the forge and anvil and went to work in a factory, where he eventually rose to the position of general superintendent.

Before he got so high as that he had won Bessie for his wife. He invested the greater part of his fortune in his father-in-law's factory, and eventually he will be the sole owner. Mr. Carter intends to leave his interest to his wife in trust for his daughter.

And so we will bid adieu to Billy the blacksmith, who rose from the anvil to a snug fortune.

Next week's issue will contain "SHARP & SMART, THE YOUNG BROKERS, AND HOW THEY MADE A MILLION (A Wall Street story)."

SEND POSTAL FOR OUR FREE CATALOGUE

CURRENT NEWS

Ruby Dennis, a girl of 10, was the victor in the Macon, Miss., district spelling contest recently. For an hour and a half, big and little, were given the ten picked students and at the close of that time Miss Dennis and Lucile Heifner had missed a word. For a long time the two girls spelled on the match and finally Miss Heifner slipped two n's in "millinery."

Otto Donaldson shot a gray fox the other day in the town of Versink, Sullivan County, N. Y. It was the first gray fox shot many years in that section, and many believed at first that it is a silver gray, the skin of which is very valuable. A few years ago a silver gray fox, which was shot in Sullivan County, is presented to the Museum of Natural History in New York City.

It just became known, through legal papers filed in court, that lot in Vine street, Cincinnati, Ohio, was sold for \$100,000 by President Taft to Melville E. Ingalls, former president of the B. & O. Railroad. The property is situated in the center of the business district, and is 50 by 50 feet. It was leased by Mr. Ingalls, with the privilege of purchasing, when the Ingalls skyscraper was erected.

Samuel Slaken, eighteen years old, of Atlantic City, N. J., joked at the hospital surgeons recently while they sewed on his left thumb, which had been shattered by the accidental discharge of a gun. Slaken clipped off the thumb with his penknife, wrapped up, put it in his pocket, stopped the flow of blood and then liked to the hospital, a block from his home. The surgeons believe the unusual operation will be successful.

The Commission appointed to study the condition of the Leaning Tower of Pisa, which caused some anxiety last year, has almost finished its report. The Commission considers that the Leaning Tower is in no danger, although since 1817 it has become slowly and slightly more slanting. The bells can now, therefore, be rung without risk, and measures have been taken to register the least further deviation of the Tower from the perpendicular.

A boldly executed robbery occurred in Berlin, Germany, recently, when \$125,000 was stolen from a postal wagon used to collect the money shipments of the various Berlin sub-stations. The criminal got away, leaving no clues to his identity behind. Later, however, he was taken into custody accidentally and most of the money is recovered. Among the booty found on the prisoner was the sum of \$2,968, presumably the contents of registered letters which had been mailed to America.

Miss Ula Razelle, a stenographer, of Kalamazoo, Mich., has just been notified that Ralph Meecham, of Albany, a school-days sweetheart, has died, leaving her \$30,000. Miss Razelle's parents reside in Niles, Mich. "I never dreamed that he cared so much for me. I did not even know he was sick. While we have been friends for the last few years, we have not corresponded so very much," said Miss Razelle. "Yes, I am going to quit my position when I get the money," she added. Miss Razelle is twenty-six years old.

The life's savings of "Jack" Simpson, of Aitkin, Minn., amounting to \$2,565, securely hidden from burglars, were reduced to a few cents by rats and mice, and in a letter received by President Taft recently, he applied for the redemption of the fragments by the Treasury. He was saving his money to buy a farm. The president referred the letter to the Treasury Department. The department recently redeemed for a Kansas farmer a roll of bills which slipped out of his pocket while he was ploughing and was buried in the soil for a year.

The report on the first carload of grapes shipped from Lodi, Calif., packed in redwood sawdust, has just been received and it is to the effect that the experiment has proved a complete success. The grapes were packed six weeks ago in drums with odorless redwood sawdust and were kept here until a few days ago, when they were forwarded to the market for the holiday trade. They are reported as retaining their color and flavor perfectly as firm as when picked from the vines. Local growers and shippers will now ship in large quantities table grapes packed in this way.

Daniel Sargent, a member of the Harvard junior class, shed a tear upon himself and brought renown to his alma mater recently by kicking a football over thirty miles of muddy road from Cambridge to Ipswich. It took him eight hours and a half to accomplish the feat and he won a wager of \$100. Gordon Grant, another junior, was the loser. A few days ago Grant ran it in six hours and 34 minutes. He took a natural pride in his achievement until Sargent began to ridicule him. "I can kick a football to Ipswich in a day," boasted Sargent. "I'll bet you can't," replied Grant.

Standing toe to toe at the corner of New Main street and Nepperhan avenue, in the principal section of Yonkers, N. Y., recently, two Italians fought with stilettos for fully ten minutes. The men are cousins, and fought over a loan. Both are in St. Joseph's Hospital, mortally wounded. After the fight John De Luca, 32 years old, of 136 New Main street, had enough strength to crawl over to Washington Park, where he hid himself under a bench. When examined at the hospital it was found that he had thirty-four wounds. Pasquale De Luca, 24 years old, of 19 Clinton street, has three stab wounds in the abdomen.

A young man was arrested in New York City recently for taking two loaves of bread from a grocery store in the Bronx. He had started to eat the bread when he was arrested. He proved to be John Quinn, eighteen years old, of no address, and was released under probation by Magistrate Freschi in the Morrisania court after his story had been verified. Quinn said he had not eaten for two days, and when starting to walk to a grocery store, where he had obtained work, he saw the bread and it tempted him. He said he had left home a year ago because his father was a drunkard. The charge of petty larceny was changed to disorderly conduct, and he was released under six months' probation.

Honor bound to return to serve out his life sentence as soon as he had earned money with which to pay off a debt he owed his father-in-law, William Mack is back in the penitentiary again, at Salem, Oregon, after an absence of six months. Mack is serving a sentence for the slaying of George Carter at Grant's Pass. That he might have money with which to defend himself at the trial, his father-in-law mortgaged his home. Governor West learned that Mack's family was destitute. Bidding the prisoner to go out and earn enough to pay off the mortgage and provide something for his family, the Governor released Mack with only the man's word as security.

Ranchers in the southwest part of Greeley county, Kansas, are now feeding a big bunch of antelope, running wild. It is necessary in order to keep them from starving until the snow melts, for it has covered every weed and all the grass. For the first time in this country wild animals must be cared for or starvation will result. There is more than a foot of snow on the level and nothing possible for the antelope to eat is to be found in all the big sweep of upland. Greeley county is almost as level as a floor, all over, but the big herd that has been running wild for years finds subsistence all of the winter, excepting in a case of this sort, and the ranchers are looking after their needs now.

The Boston National League Baseball Club has just passed officially into new hands, and the coming season James E. Gaffney, the well-known New York business man, and John M. Ward, once captain of the New York Giants and now a lawyer and prominent golf player, will direct its affairs and endeavor to have the team finish in something better than last place, which it has occupied for several years. The reorganization was effected through the purchase by Messrs. Gaffney and Ward of the stock of the late William Hepburn Russell, and at the annual meeting Mr. Ward was elected president and Mr. Gaffney treasurer. The club retained the services of Peter Kelly, who has acted as secretary and clerk, while the new board of directors includes the three officers and Todd Russell, son of the late president, and Fred J. Murphy, of this city.

The navy rules for next spring's practice, which are now being prepared by the director of target practice, will provide for firing by squads of eight ships. The targets will be towed in such a manner as to represent the "enemy's fleet" and reproduce as far as possible battle conditions. In effect the fleet when in target practice will engage in a battle with the enemy's fleet of targets towed at full speed. The minimum range under these conditions will be ten thousand yards. Most of the firing will be done at ranges from seventeen to eighteen thousand yards. Even beyond this range the battleship commanders will be ordered to open fire with the view of determining the extreme distance at which hits can be made. There are a number of other changes that are under consideration by the target practice director for the purpose of creating as near as possible battle conditions.

A recent consular report states that within five years there will probably be 200 wireless telegraph stations in operation in the Congo. A telefunken station is in operation at Boma the capital of Belgian Congo, and a station of the French Ferrier type at Banana, the principal seaport. Each of these is of 1½ kilowatts, but the latter will shortly be increased to 5 kilowatts. The Telefunken engineers expected to erect in September a 5-kilowatt station at St. Paul de Loanda, in the adjoining Portuguese territory at Angola, after which a station was to be established at Leopoldville, on the Congo River. If these stations prove successful, an extensive series of stations will be erected all along the Congo and Kasai rivers. The French company expects in the near future to erect a station at Loango, French Congo, and later stations in all the French west African colonies.

BILLY, THE BROKER'S BOY

OR,

THE WIRE TAPPERS OF WALL STREET

By HORACE APPLETON

(A SERIAL STORY)

CHAPTER IV. (continued)

What happened after that Tony did not stop to see, but hurried back by the way he had come.

When he got to the upper room of the old house on Greenwich street, where the events described in the last chapter had taken place, he found the door fastened and he proceeded to open it with a latch key.

The light was turned down now, and the room was vacant save for the girl, Blanche, who lay upon the lounge in a deep sleep.

On the operating table was a scrap of paper upon which the following words were scrawled:

"Tony—I have given Blanche a dose; she's good to sleep till midnight if let alone. I've gone uptown on business and shall go out to the toll house afterward. You'll have to stick to the wire all night, for there's no knowing what may happen. Blanche can start if she wakes up before midnight; if not, let her stay where she is till morning. Matt."

"Huh!" muttered Tony, he always gives me a night job. I'm blamed if I'll stand it. I mean to have my supper just the same, risk or no risk.

Just at this time Nick Price, the detective, sat in Mr. Vanderbeak's private office smoking a cigar.

Mr. Vanderbeak had gone home, and so had all the clerks. The new private secretary had chosen to stay behind them, and from the uneasy fashion in which he twirled around in the millionaire's swing chair it was quite evident that he felt anything but satisfied with himself.

It was now almost five o'clock, and there really was no good reason why the detective should linger at the office to which he had been provided with a key so that he could come and go at any time.

Yet he stayed on and kept swinging around in the chair.

"I had them! I had them on the wire, sure," he muttered. "The suspicions I formed of Harold Harcourt long before Mr. Vanderbeak sent for me to engage on this case are quite correct. The wire tappers thought they were talking with him, and if I could have kept it up a few moments longer I might have learned something. I wonder what it was that gave me away?"

Now Nick Price had said this same thing to himself a hundred times without getting any satisfactory answer.

He had been lingering in the office, hoping that the wire tappers would call up Harcourt again, but it was now too

late to expect anything of that sort. He would have given a good deal to have known how to reach them, but to have solved that problem would be to have gained the key to the whole mystery.

"I don't believe that it is ever done from this office," muttered Nick. "If Harcourt is in with these fellows he has some other way of reaching them. Well, I must make a move. That fellow will never go to California. He will pretend to, but he will stay right here. What game is he working? That's what puzzles me."

The detective arose and proceeded to examine the telephone, something that he had done many times since Mr. Vanderbeak left for home, but the instrument would not give up its secret, and Nick prepared to go.

His preparations were rather peculiar. Pulling down the shade, he took off his coat and vest and proceeded to unbutton certain unusual buttons in the lining to turn inside out the garments, which assumed a very different appearance under his hands.

From a plain business suit they were completely transformed in style and appearance. Another tie, another collar, a false mustache of glossy black and a different hat which came all folded up out of one of the coat pockets did the rest.

When Nick had finished his work he was a different looking person altogether—a fashionable young man about town, in short. He took a photograph out of his pocket, studied the face and then his own before the glass, where he proceeded to "touch up" with the contents of a small box.

"There!" he exclaimed. "I think I will pass for Harold Harcourt, now. I'll try the club to-night, although it's a big risk, for if I am detected the game is up."

He left the office and started for the elevator, where at once he saw a boy coming along the hall who seemed to be eyeing him in rather a curious way.

Nick stopped before the elevator and was about to touch the electric button when the boy came hurrying up.

"Hello, Mr. Harcourt," he whispered. "Didn't expect to see you here. I was just going to the office to make sure, though. Matt wants you. He's on the 'phone.'"

"Hit 'em the first shot!" thought the detective, what reply to make was a shade too much for him.

"It's late. I'm in a hurry," he said, with a view to drawing the boy out further.

"He says he must talk to you," urged the boy. "Two minutes, take you a minute. It's late and I want to go home."

"All right. Go along, and I'll talk to him," said Nick. The elevator was up now, and the boy started for it.

"Be sure you lock the door," he whispered. "You've got our key?"

"Yes," replied the detective, and the boy stepped into the elevator and was gone.

"A clew!" muttered Nick. "A veritable clew. The wire tappers must have an office on this floor, but which is there's the rub?"

Nick Price glided back along the hall, wondering how the wire tappers could be so foolish as to employ a boy to manage their affairs, and studying the signs upon the office doors.

As he drew near the end of the corridor he heard a telephone bell ringing. It rang again and again as though the person at the end of the line was growing impatient at receiving no answer.

"That's it—that's it," muttered the detective. "It ought to be in here."

He paused before a door which had painted upon the glass "Smith & Co., Exporters." The bell continued to ring furiously. Nick drew a bunch of skeleton keys from his pocket and went to work on the door, which was locked. It took a moment to do it, and then the door flew open, disclosing a small but handsomely furnished office. There was a telephone in one corner, and the bell was ringing like mad.

Pausing only to make sure that he was alone, the detective closed and locked the door, hurried to the 'phone to answer the call and the following conversation took place:

"Hello! Hello!"

"Hello! That you, Tom?"

"No—Harcourt."

"Harcourt! What's the matter with your voice?"

"Got a cold. Tom just came and called me. Thought you might want to talk to me, so I dropped into the office."

"Van!"

Right here Nick Price gave evidence of that wonderful shrewdness which had placed his name at the head of the list of New York detectives.

"That's a test word," he instantly determined. "Stupid business! Anyone could guess that."

"Der," he instantly replied over the 'phone.

"Beak!" came the answer. "That's all right, Harcourt. Only wanted to make sure it was you."

"Sure now?"

"Yes. Did you get me this afternoon?"

"Certainly. What made you cut me off so almighty sudden?"

"Got scared. Thought it might be a detective."

"Pshaw! It was me. What do you want? I'm in a hurry."

"We've got the boy."

"Hello! You don't mean it!"

"Yes. Blanche caught him on the fly this afternoon and I did the rest."

"Good enough. What's the next thing on the program?"

"Why, the next thing is for you to cash in. A job like that isn't done without a certain amount paid in advance, see?"

"I'm ready."

"How much?"

"How much do you want?"

"Half."

"Put it in plain figures. Put it in plain figures, man! How much do you want? How will you take it? When and where?"

"Perhaps. Speak out."

"Five thousand, then."

"You shall have it."

"To-night at the old toll house on the Newark plank road. You'll be there?"

"I certainly will. What time?"

"Oh, about eleven o'clock; a little earlier or a little later will make no odds."

"Very good. That all?"

"Yes. Say, hold on!"

"I'm here."

"How's the market?"

"All right."

"We fixed Silverman nice, didn't we?"

"Fine."

"Had to do it, Harcourt. He's been kicking up a deuce of a row about our doings. We wanted to put him on the retired list."

"Well I think you have succeeded. The old man swears he won't put out a hand to help him from going to the wall."

"Keep him in that mind."

"Trust me. That all?"

"Yes; you'll be on hand?"

"I told you so, and I mean it. Good-by."

"Good-by."

Nick Price hung up the receiver and proceeded to make a careful examination of the office, but not a thing did he discover to connect the place with the wire tappers' work.

"I've made a beginning," he muttered. "Now, then, for the next move. I've passed muster with the boy, Tom, all right but how will it be to-night when I show up at the old toll house on the Newark road?"

Whereupon Nick Price let himself out of the office and hurried down to the street.

CHAPTER V.

A PRISONER IN THE OLD TOLL HOUSE.

Away out on the Newark plank road, just at the beginning of the bridge, there stood at the time of which we write an ancient frame building, formerly a toll house, but now given up to a saloon on the ground floor with living rooms above.

It was a desolate spot; a region through which many pass on their way across the great Jersey meadows, but where no one lingers a moment longer than necessary, especially in summer when the mosquitoes are thick and fierce and the odors of the great manure heaps and chemical factories are enough to turn the stomach of an elephant, to say nothing of a man.

Shortly after nightfall on the evening of the day of these happenings a covered wagon drew up before the "Old Toll House Tavern," as the sign read, and the driver giving a sharp whistle, sat still, waiting for what was to happen next.

Immediately the door of the saloon opened and a man in his shirt sleeves came hurrying out.

"Tony sent you a boarder," whispered the driver. "Shall I bring him in?"

"Humph! You're early."

"I've got other business to attend to. I came right along," was the reply.

"Well, we'll take him in. As well now as any time—there don't seem to be anybody around. Who is he?"

"Don't know. Asked no questions."

"What's to be done with him?"

"Kept till Matt comes. That's the order."

"When will that be?"

"Oh, some time this evening, I suppose. I don't know exactly. I didn't ask."

Now every word of this conversation reached the ears of Billy, the broker's boy, as he lay gagged and bound on the floor of the wagon, feeling anything but comfortable after his long ride, as may well be imagined.

Where he was or just what had happened, Billy had no sort of an idea, for his senses did not return to him until he was in the wagon, but one thing was firmly fixed in his mind.

He was in the clutches of the wire tappers of Wall street. There was a big reward offered for their capture. Billy wanted that reward.

"They mean to do me," thought the boy, "but I don't intend to let them. If I'm sharp I can turn this business my way; what I want to do now is to play possum and hear their talk."

So instead of kicking up a fuss Billy kept his eyes shut and held his breath when they took him out of the wagon, carried him into the toll house and up a steep flight of stairs.

"Blamed if I don't think he's dead, Córney," growled the driver, as they dropped their burden on a dirty bed in a little four by nine room.

"Nothing to me if he is," replied the saloon keeper. "I s'pose Matt gave him too heavy a dose. Let him stop where he is till they come."

The door was shut and locked, and a little later Billy heard the wagon rattle away. There had been no talk to give him the slightest information, but Billy didn't despair. "I can work now," he thought, "and if I can't get rid of these infernal cords I'll know the reason why. Great Scott! If I could only get on to the secrets of these fellows it might be the beginning of my fortune. I haven't been on the Street two years for nothing. If I only had a few thousands in my pocket I think I know where to place it so that it would start the ball a-rolling, and once I get it started nothing will satisfy me short of becoming a millionaire."

Thus it will be seen that Billy, the broker's boy, was ambitious, and when you come to add common sense and courage to ambition, all concentrated in one boy's make-up, it means a great deal.

But the first thing of all was for Billy to free himself from his bonds, and he went to work with a will to do this. For two hours he tugged and strained at the cords which tied his hands behind him, listening all the while to the sounds in the saloon below, where men's voices could be heard, sometimes talking loud and angrily, sometimes sing-

ing, until at last they died away altogether and were heard no more.

Besides these there were other sounds which interested Billy a great deal more. These came from the next room apparently. It was a man's voice calling into a telephone. It was only heard occasionally, and no words could be distinguished. Every time the bell rang Billy strained his ears to listen, and the last time he made a quick turn as to get his ear closer to the wall, when all at once the cords about his wrists snapped, and a moment later Billy stood on the floor with the gag out of his mouth—free!

He could hardly realize it—the relief had come to him so suddenly, but he lost no time in making the most of his good luck.

Stealing toward the door, which to his great joy he found unlocked, he was about to pass out when the telephone bell rang violently again, the sound coming from behind a door right alongside of him, through the crack of which a faint light beamed.

"What's the matter? Why don't they answer!" thought Billy. "By gracious, this must be another hold-out of the wire tappers!"

He stooped down and put his eye to the keyhole. All he could see was a switch board and an operating table. Not a sound was to be heard except that furious ringing of the bell.

"That's going to bring someone up from below," thought Billy. "There's no one in there now. What's the matter with me going in!"

"Fools rush in where wise men dare not tread," thought Billy. Whether Billy, the broker's boy, was a fool or not he lost no time in trying the door of the lighted room.

Like the one of his own prison, it proved to be unfortified, and Billy found himself before the operating table in an instant and then he knew that he was not alone.

Over in a corner stretched upon a dirty lounge lay a man in his shirt sleeves sound asleep; an opium pipe and a little lamp rested upon a chair alongside the lounge. The telephone bell was still ringing, and it might have gone on ringing indefinitely as far as this man was concerned for he lay there scarcely seeming to breathe, deep in his opium sleep.

"Hello! He's been hitting the pipe," thought Billy. "By gracious, I suppose I'm risking my life by stopping here one minute, but I think I'll answer that call."

He dropped into the chair by the operating table, and clapping the receiver to his ear, called out:

"Hello! Hello!"

CHAPTER VI.

BILLY MAKES AN ASTONISHING DISCOVERY AND TAKES A BATH.

"Hello!" came the answer over the wire. "What a thunder is the matter? Have you been at the pipe again?"

"Well, I just took a little smoke," mumbled Billy.

Here was business—which was not a bad imitation of Nick Price's work. It seemed as if the wire tappers on Wall street were having a hard time with detectives that night.

(To be continued)

GRIT AND GOLD

OR,

WORKING FOR A FORTUNE

By ALEXANDER ARMSTRONG

CHAPTER XV. (continued)

"We will gladly accept your offer," replied Bob, "though the duties may be strange to us."

"They are simple and easily learned. You may keep the car clean and ventilated and look after the usual duties of a porter and assistant."

"But the present incumbents——"

"I will shift them to the next car. They will not be discharged."

This settled all scruples.

Bob and Tony went aboard the superintendent's car. That was a pleasant trip to Denver.

The superintendent, whose name was Clark, took a great interest in Bob when he learned his story.

"Let me see the deed of your land, boy," he said.

Bob produced the deed. Mr. Clark glanced over it. When he gave a great cry.

"Mercy on us!" he cried. "How do you know, my lad, that that you have a gold mine? Why, the very next section and range to you is the recently discovered Matanzas mode, where a million dollars' worth of ore was taken out one week."

Bob's brain swam.

"Oh, Mr. Clark," he said. "Do you think it possible that there could be gold on my land?"

"It is not only possible, but very likely," replied the superintendent. "Go right out there and look up your rights. A little grit is all that is needed."

"That is my motto," replied Bob. "Grit and Gold."

"Capital!" cried Mr. Clark, with delight and interest. "Nothing could be better. Grit is sure to win gold."

When they reached Denver Bob and Tony were in high spirits and ready for the thrilling and delightful excitements of the future. A new era in their lives was at hand.

CHAPTER XVI.

PUSHING ON.

When Bob and Tony bade farewell to the genial Mr. Clark, the railroad superintendent, he placed twenty dollars in the hand of each.

"This is only a small reward for your services," he said. "But it is honestly earned pay, and you must set aside your scruples and accept it, Bob. The company would have paid you two thousand if I asked, but I respect your principle of working your way, and taking only what you earn. I will offer you no more. But you have earned this."

"If you think our services worth all that we will not demur," replied Bob. "But I think it is liberal pay. I shall be glad to see you again, Mr. Clark."

In Denver at last! Bob and Tony both felt that the future was opening before them. From Mr. Clark's description of the land they could not help but feel that it might be of value.

The fact that gold mining was conducted on adjacent land would indicate that the precious ore might be also found on Bob's land. In that case the orphan boy's motto of Grit and Gold might indeed find verification.

Bob was eager to proceed at once to the spot. His first move was to find out what the railroad fare to the nearest point was. Unfortunately the railroad was remote from the claim, so that it was necessary to make a rough journey over the wild mountain ranges.

But Mr. Clark had spoken of the likelihood of an extension of the railroad to that locality within a year. In such a case the value of the land would naturally rise appreciably.

But with only forty dollars between them the two fortune seekers found that it was quite impracticable to think of traveling one hundred and fifty miles and opening up a gold claim.

It was certainly necessary to have more money with which to buy prospecting tools and the requisite miner's equipment. Unlike the usual form of mining, which is placer, the Colorado gold is extracted from the virgin quartz by means of the stamp mill and flume.

All these things the two adventurers learned, much to their advantage. They discussed the matter again, pro and con.

"If we land there without necessary tools or money," said Bob, "I see no help for us. We would starve."

"Yes," said Tony; "that is so. Unless we might manage to live on wild game."

"To do that we would need weapons," argued Bob. "Good rifles and ammunition. They cost well."

"Just so, my lad. But I have an idea how to raise that money."

"How?" asked Bob, with interest.

"You own this land?"

"I do."

"It is free and clear?"

"The title says so."

"Now, I think you can find some wealthy man who will loan you a few hundred on it, provided you are willing to pay interest. Give him a mortgage. Take the money and develop your land. If it is what you think it is, you can pay off the mortgage in no time."

Tony looked triumphant. At first the idea looked to Bob very reasonable and business-like.

Certainly it ought to be an easy matter to pay off a few hundred dollars on a gold claim. The loan need only be a limited one.

But just then there came to Bob's memory an instance of foreclosure in his own native town of Markham. He remembered seeing a farmer dispossessed and his farm and stock ruthlessly taken from him for failure to meet a mortgage.

This at the time had made its impression on Bob. He had resolved never to be the slave of the mortgagee. He experienced a revulsion of feeling.

"Come," said the tramp, eagerly; "I am sure Mr. Clark will loan you the money. It need only be a limited loan."

Bob turned and met Tony's gaze squarely.

"No," he said, "I'll not do it."

The tramp was dumfounded. He gazed inquiringly at the orphan boy. He could hardly believe his ears.

"What!" he exclaimed. "You won't try the plan?"

"No."

"Why?"

"It is not feasible."

"Pshaw! Nine out of ten men in this country carry heavy mortgages."

"I don't care if they do," said Bob, resolutely. "I'll put no incumbrance on my land. I'll never pay interest on a mortgage."

Tony whistled and thrust his hands in his pockets. He looked to be a little out of patience.

"Well," he said finally, "of course that's principle. You can do as you choose. But you will lose valuable time."

"I prefer to do it," said Bob. "I would rather start with our present store of money."

"Well, suppose we do that?"

"Perhaps we can work our way the one hundred and fifty miles to the Golconda mines, which is the name of the gold mines near there."

"Very well," agreed Tony with a yawn; "we can make up a bundle of provisions now which ought to last us."

With this they set about their preparations. A few dollars were judiciously expended in clothing and provisions. Also a small mining outfit was bought.

Then the two fortune seekers left Denver. For days they wandered on, sleeping at night in car-sheds and even in the forest or some hillside cavern. Thus they worked their way down into the very wildest part of Colorado.

It took them two weeks to reach the Golconda mines. They had done an immense amount of tramping and experienced many adventures in that time.

But victory had crowned their efforts. Bob at last was enabled to gaze upon the rough acres of his inheritance.

And they were indeed rough. The entire tract was little else but ledge and boulder-strewn slopes.

The Golconda mines were located in a narrow valley. A mountain river foamed down through this and furnished the necessary means of washing out the gold.

Deep shafts had been cut into the mountains and hundreds of miners were busy bringing out the quartz. The stamp mills were busy day and night.

A small settlement was in the valley. It was called

Golconda, and consisted of a collection of small and cabins.

Bob and Tony gazed down upon this from the head of a mountain pass. They were hungry and footsore.

"What do ye say, lad?" asked the tramp. "Shall we go down there?"

"I see no better plan," declared Bob. "In fact there is no other way."

"Right you are, my boy. Certainly we can accomplish nothing here. We've got to have some place to stay where we get the lay of the land."

"That is true," agreed Bob. "Of course I do not know the boundaries yet. That is essential."

"Perhaps we can get a job of work in the Golconda a time."

Bob had thought of this.

"We will try it," he said. "Of course it will be a little getting started, but grit wins gold, Tony."

"Right you are, my boy," cried Tony, with rising spirit. "Let's go down there at once."

So they descended into the valley. An hour later they crossed the little river on a foot-bridge and entered the mining town of Golconda.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT GOLCONDA.

Golconda contained a population of fifteen hundred souls. Most of these were miners. There were a few gamblers and idlers, as is the case in all towns of its class.

A tramway extended from the mine ten miles down the valley to a stage station, which in turn communicated with the railroad twenty miles east.

Right in the heart of a mighty wilderness, Golconda was beyond the pale of the law, as one might say. Injustice was in the hands of the community at large, and it was generally of a summary sort.

The two travelers entered the little street of the town.

There was a small tavern, and to this they proceeded. Over the door was a sign rudely painted:

"TERRY O'HARE. HOTEL."

Bob and Tony were hungry and tired, and they indulged in a hearty meal and engaged a room. The terms were extremely reasonable, and the tavern keeper a good Irishman.

"Prospectin', are ye?" he asked in a good-natured way. "I reckon ye've come a good ways."

"Are there many prospectors in the town?" Bob asked. The landlord shook his head.

"Not on yer life," he replied. "They don't come here. Most of 'em goes further down inter the fields."

But there must be gold up in these hills," said Bob. "Bless yer soul, yes," replied O'Hare. "But it's no work to git it. An individual miner kin wash it out of a sandbank easier than to blow it out of a quartz ledge and hev to pay commission to the quartz mill. See?"

"I see," agreed Bob. "But the Golconda makes money."

In course, fer they are a big stock company. Why, it cost fifty thousand dollars fer the stamp mill thet y use. Ye see, no poor miner kin do that."

Bob's heart sank a bit with this intelligence. It began to look, after all, as if his inheritance was a white elephant. That there was gold, perhaps to the value of millions, on his land, there was no doubt. But it must certainly be there so far as his present ability to claim it was concerned.

He had not enough money to develop it, and just how was to secure it was a problem.

However, he said nothing more. But when they reached that night the two gold seekers had a long conversation.

"I am in an anomalous position," declared Bob. "I have a fortune and yet have not got it. I am legatee of riches which nature holds in trust. Can I secure possession of those riches?"

"I think if you had raised a little money by mortgage you could have got a start with it, my boy," said Tony. Perhaps you were right, Tony," agreed Bob. "But I could not see it at the time. However, we must do the best we can. Perhaps we can find a pocket of gold or something of that sort to give us a lift."

At least it will do no harm to put in a few days of prospecting."

Certainly not."

They slept soundly. At an early hour Bob was astir. He went down and consulted with O'Hare.

He inquired about the various claims in the vicinity, but took care not to mention that he was the owner of the land himself.

As near as possible he got the location of his own. He soon learned that it was one of the largest in the region, comprising three thousand acres.

When Tony came down a little later Bob was all ready for the start.

"You're a hustler, Bob," said the tramp, jovially. "I give you an apology for oversleeping. But I'll be ready soon."

"All right, my dear pard," said Bob, with a laugh. "I can hardly wait to get there. Just think of the romance of searching for gold on one's own land!"

"I hope we will find a bonanza."

"So do I."

They were soon ready. They took with them the small chest in which they had bought in Denver, and also one which they had bought from the tavern keeper.

"I hope ye'll have good luck, gents," said O'Hare, jovially. "But there's one thing I'd warn ye against."

"What is that?" asked Bob.

"Prospectin' on any private claim. People out here hev a notion of shootin' first an' explainin' afterward, an' the law backs 'em up in it."

Bob hesitated a moment. He looked at Tony and then at O'Hare. The tavern keeper seemed to be a wholehearted, honest fellow. Bob decided to tell the truth.

"Well," he said, "you see, I ought to be all safe, for I have my own claim."

The tavern keeper started as if shot, and a strange expression flitted across his face.

"Eh?" he exclaimed. "You own a claim hereabouts?"

"Yes."

"How large? Five or six acres?"

"No, three thousand!" replied Bob.

O'Hare gasped and leaned over the bar. He stared at Bob.

"For the love of Heaven!" he exclaimed. "Do ye know that's enough to make ye the richest man in Colorado? Why, that's more gold hereabouts than anywhere else in the State."

"I am glad to know that," said Bob, with delight.

"An' you own three thousand acres?"

"Yes."

"Ain't that a mistake?"

"No, sir."

"Whereabouts is it? Nigh here?"

"Well, as near as I can reckon, it is," replied Bob, drawing the deed from his pocket. "Here are the boundaries."

O'Hare took the deed and looked it over carefully. Then he handed it back to Bob and took down a bottle of whiskey.

"Have a drink," he said. "You're the luckiest man I know."

"No, I thank you," replied Bob; "but I hope you will consider this confidential."

"Ye may be sure I will."

"And you are really sure my land is rich with gold?"

"That's big ledges of gold quartz up thar, my lad. Why, the best step down to the office of the Golconda Company. They'll give ye half a million at sight fer yer claim."

Bob's brain swam. Tony's eyes seemed like to burst from his head.

"Oh, Bob," he whispered; "and to think thet shark of an old farmer came nigh getting it away from you fer one of your father's debts."

"I owe that to you, Tony," replied Bob, with feeling. "You shall see that I am not ungrateful."

O'Hare had drunk alone. The liquor flushed his face.

"Now, lad," he said in a friendly way, "I s'pose ye've got money to develop yer claim?"

"No," replied Bob. "Not a cent. There is the trouble."

O'Hare brought his hand down on the bar with a bang.

"I'll loan ye twenty thousand on yer word," he cried.

Bob reached over the bar and shook O'Hare's hand.

"Mr. O'Hare," he said, "I thank you very kindly, but I cannot accept your offer."

"Why?" asked the tavern keeper.

"I am going to work the problem out alone, that is all," declared Bob.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A LUCKY STRIKE.

O'Hare looked disappointed. But he said good-naturedly:

"Oh, well, that's your own affair, lad, and I wish you luck. But I'm afraid you're up against a big job. Have ye thought of what ye'll have to go up against?"

(To be continued)

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ITEMS OF CURRENT NEWS

A shark seventeen feet long was recently captured in Delaware Bay by James Keyes, of Lightship No. 60. In the shark's stomach, among other trifles, was a silk umbrella.

To help a puzzled airman to find his bearings quickly a simple suggestion is made in the German Aeronautical Journal by Col. von Frankenberg, who proposes that dials on churches placed at an elevation should be made to act as indicators of the locality.

In view of past predictions that the big drydock No. 4, in the New York Navy Yard, could never be built, owing to the physical conditions of the ground, Secretary Meyer took pleasure recently in announcing that the official reports to him made it certain that the dock would be ready for use by the end of next January. It already has been flooded. All that remains to be done is to place the pumping machinery, excavate the bank in front of the dock, and put the caisson in place.

"Passengers on the Southern Indiana Railway from Westport to Elizabethtown had a bad 'scare' one morning recently when the train came to a sudden standstill in a cornfield and reports of a gun were heard a few minutes later," said a traveling man. "They thought they were going to be held up and that murder had already been committed. Their fears were allayed, however, when a trainman came inside and reported that the brakeman had seen a covey of quail and had stopped the train to take a shot at them."

An elephant in Augby, England, attached to a traveling circus, did considerable in the way of "painting the town red." At night he escaped from the stables, and then determined to have a jolly time. He burst open the door of a small cottage, squeezed in, unfastened the cupboard, and dined on a dozen pots of jam, a gallon of pickled onions, a supply of damsons, a joint of meat, a loaf of bread, a pound of butter, and a quantity of sweets; and then, perfectly happy, lay down on the floor. After two hours' hard labor he was induced to leave the cottage.

Mexy, the three-year-old hairless dog of Dr. B. Brosser, 934 La Salle avenue, Chicago, now possesses double row of gold teeth. He has twelve of them. Grosser, who is a post-graduate student at the Chicago Dental College, gave Mexy the valuable masticators. dog, suffering from abscesses which prevented it from ing, was presented to him a month ago. Dr. Grosser constructed a special bridge for Mexy's mouth, and after extracting nine of the natural teeth, substituted the gold ones.

JOKES AND JESTS.

Little Harry—I'm hungry. I didn't get half enough dinner. Elsie—What did you have? Harry—Comp

He—Would you marry a one-eyed man? She—Graciously no! He—Then you'd better let me carry your umbrella for you.

He—Do you know, an awful lot of women chased at me before I was married. She—They must have been an awful lot.

"Mother, did grandma whip father when he was a little boy?" "Yes." "And did his father whip him when he was little?" "Yes." "Well, how far back did the thing start, anyway?"

"I'm almost sure the count is in love with me!" modestly exclaimed the first heiress. "What makes you think so?" inquired the other. "He asked me to-day how much I was worth."

"I think I had better get a job before we marry." "Don't be so unromantic, Ferdie. I won't need any clothing for a long time." "But you may want to eat almost immediately, my dear."

"Good morning, ma'am," began the temperance woman. "I'm collecting for the Inebriates' Home, and—" "What's your husband's out," replied Mrs. McGuire, "but if you find him anywheres you're welcome to him."

Bill Nye and a fellow humorist were making a tour through Illinois. Nye's companion, looking through the peephole of a village theater curtain, said: "Bill, the house is just about empty." "I don't see why," replied the humorist. "We've never been here before."

New Boarder—Well! well! This is the first place I've struck where they have preserved strawberries and jam instead of stewed prunes. Old Boarder—All of this to organization, my boy. We boarders have a mutual protective association, with iron-clad rules and heavy penalties. New Boarder—Oh, ho! You kicked against prunes, did you? Old Boarder—Not much we didn't. We passed a law that whenever prunes came on the table every member should eat a quart or pay a ten-dollar fine. That's what killed it. The landlady found prunes too expensive.

THISTLEDOWN.

By Kit Clyde

Harry Lathrop, riding his fleet-footed young horse, Fan, was making good time in the direction of the small eastern town where that evening the wonderful performances of a certain Mlle. Zenie, together with the sagacious and bewildering speed of the well-trained equine collection, were to stir all the town folk and country folk about. Not a girl who could muster up a new ribbon, her best hat, a slightly beau, or, better still to a Western, a good saddle pony, but was agog for the circus—not a showboy, choreboy, or spruce young tiller of the soil but was ready to drive fifteen miles to see the show that was tugging the population "by the ears."

Suddenly the lad came to a halt. Something which he first took for a huge vulture, but which, as it winged its way toward him, proved to be an eagle, made him draw in.

It was rarely an eagle was seen so far from the mountains. He came to earth near Harry, but as the heavy flapping of the creature's wings had perturbed his horse, the latter made a sudden plunge at the moment and startled the huge bird again on the wing. As he rose from his perch the young rider caught the glint of something which shined in the sunlight as it fell from the eagle's beak. For one instant it was seen darting through the rays of the setting sun, then was lost in the deep undergrowth in which the creature emerged.

Harry quickly dismounted and discovered the glittering nugget, which proved to be a slender strand of gold.

A strange token indeed to have found its way into the pocket of the the great mountain bird.

Wondering the curious incident, the lad was presently on his way, and two hours later had forgotten it in the bewildering mazes of the ring, with its bedizened performers and their phenomenal exploits.

It was late when he left the scene of the show and prepared to mount for his homeward ride through the starlight. What, as he passed the outskirts of the tent a feeble wail like a baby's cry smote his ears. He paused and looked out, and saw, not ten feet away, the tiny form of a child. He hastened toward it and found the little creature alone on a small patch of grass and seeds not far from one of the tents. It was a fairy-like morsel of about two years, delicate and pretty, and very tastefully clothed.

He stooped over it and was lifting it in his arms, when a lady passed him. He turned and inquired if she knew aught of the little creature, which stretched forth its little arms and wailed out the word "mamma" at her approach.

Why, to be sure I do! How in the world did the child come here? She was left safe enough."

"I am glad I heard it," said Harry, quite relieved to have a claimant for the child.

The woman, thanking him, turned hastily away and was gone in the night.

In the woman's face the lad had not recognized that of Mlle. Zenie, the marvelous rider whose performances he had been but now applauding. Her changed garb

and the gloom of night combined to render it impossible that he would. But the child's face was the most exquisite one he had ever seen. He should always remember it, he felt sure, as it looked up into his in the wan starlight.

Ten years had passed away and Harry Lathrop had begun the practice of law in the city of Chicago.

One day while passing along a thoroughfare he saw a policeman leading by the hand a little girl.

She was a pretty, delicately formed child, though poorly attired and was weeping bitterly.

He could not refrain from asking the officer concerning his unhappy little charge.

"A little runaway," said the officer laconically. "Mother's been telegraphing in all directions—received orders to hold the child, if found, at the station house."

The little girl looked up timidly and turned her small, white face with its tear-drenched eyes upon the stranger, whose kind tones seemed to have given her momentary courage, for she was trembling with terror.

"Oh, sir, she is not my mother—she told me so herself—or I should not have run away. She is cruel to me, sir. If I fall in the ring, she beats me—"

"Ring? Do you then ride in a circus—so small a creature as yourself?"

"Oh, yes, sir. They call me Thistledown. Please don't let me be taken to the station house—I will be good and stay where I am told—Oh!"

A wild, terrified shriek broke through the child's beseeching tones, and the next instant a rude grasp was laid upon her shoulder, while the young man turned to encounter the embodiment of fury in the person of a tall, hard-featured woman, whose physique would have proclaimed her a beauty but for the worldly selfishness of her face, now pale with uncontrollable passion. Ignoring the presence of the two men, she broke forth with a torrent of abuse, while she shook the little one violently.

"Little wretch! Ingrate! Young sneak! Thus it is you repay the kindness of years. You desert me? Mon Dieu! You will not escape me!" and the woman shot forth a torrent of French expletives quite incomprehensible to her listeners so rapid was her utterance. She was evidently a foreigner, perhaps a Mexican.

The child grew deathly pale beneath her grasp, and then all in a moment tottered and dropped a limp heap to the ground.

At sight of this effect upon the little one Lathrop's sympathy and indignation was fully aroused. All the chivalry of his nature was awakened at the realization that so helpless a creature was at the mercy of this hardened woman. With flashing eyes he pushed the enraged guardian aside, and lifted the child from the pavement. Without a moment's hesitation he hailed a passing cab, and flinging his professional card to the officer he sprang in and was off before the two realized his intention. It was a bold stroke, and Lathrop had given himself little time to think, but as he chanced at the time to be stopping with an old friend, the lawyer with whom he had pursued his studies, and who, leading the lonely life of a childless widower, enjoyed the companionship of the younger man, he knew the child would receive proper care upon his arrival, and felt, moreover, his friend, Mr. Randolph, would assist him to

protecting the little waif if her relation with the assumed guardian should prove illegal.

He was not mistaken. Mr. Randolph approved of the young man's course, and prepared to encounter the would-be mother, whom they momentarily expected to arrive, well prepared to assert her claim. But they were disappointed. Neither she nor the officer appeared. As they sat late that night discussing the events, Mr. Randolph fell into a reminiscence of his life.

"I married," said he, "a beautiful woman, of a remarkably sensitive nature. Apart from possible weak health, I had reason to fear no change in my wife, although she had always been subject to conditions of despondency, which for long puzzled me much.

"I was, however, utterly unprepared for the awful denouement which followed, and which has cast a blight over my whole life. We happened to be traveling at the time, and were stopping for the night at a Western terminus. I awoke at day dawn to find my wife had flown.

"During this very journey it had been my fortune to learn the facts of a former love affair of my wife, but of which she had never informed me. Her affianced lover had deserted her, and to this occurrence I could now attribute her frequent melancholy. Naturally my first thought was of him, for it so chanced he also was then stopping in that locality. You may imagine my frenzied anxiety when search availed nothing.

"At last, however, I discovered she was not with him, and as a portion of her apparel was found on the bank of an adjacent river I was compelled to believe she had sought death as a respite from her unhappy condition of mind.

"The fact that the poor girl had committed suicide was bad enough in itself, but even this was not the worst," and Mr. Randolph passed his hand over his brow with a deep sigh.

"In the sleep of death I knew the restless soul had found peace, but there remained for me a woe not to be easily assuaged; a horrible goading suspense concerning the— Ah! What is that?"

For the sound of a sudden scuffle, followed by a heavy fall, was heard on the floor right above their heads.

As it was approaching the silent hour of midnight and the occupants of the house had retired, the tumult seemed unaccountable until a sudden thought flashed through the brain of Mr. Randolph.

"My heavens. That child!" he cried.

She had been put into the chamber above to sleep, and the words had scarcely passed his lips before a soft, rustling sound behind him caused both men to turn.

Lathrop sprang to his feet and stood transfixed before what seemed unreal indeed, and yet he felt could be no trick of a disordered fancy.

Whether mortal or immortal, certainly the object which held his gaze was clearly defined and awful, as it stood revealed in the shadow of the open door.

Mr. Randolph had flashed one glance over his shoulder, then turned back with a shudder and groan.

"Again!" he murmured.

Sheathed from head to foot in white gossamer drapery, a pair of eyes set, staring, alone apparent through the pale disk, the spectre—if spectre it were—appeared for a brief

instant before them, then was lost like a flash in the ness of the corridor.

Through the intense silence three ominous words upon their ears:

"I am avenged!"

For a moment both men paled, then Mr. Randolph lected himself and rose to his feet.

"That is the second appearance of the kind in this that has startled my not easily shocked nerves. The something going on which I am determined this to ferret out."

As he spoke Mr. Randolph, accompanied by Lathrop, hastened into the hallway whither the figure had vanished. They rushed up the stairway toward the apartment where the noise had proceeded which had interrupted their course a few minutes previous.

The door of the chamber stood ajar.

They stepped over the threshold, and the scene which met their gaze was appalling.

At the window before the shattered casement stood the same white clad figure which a moment before had startled them. She paused at their entrance, with arms raised for a second blow upon the sash, and turned them a ghastly face, now unveiled, lit by two piercing, while a mocking, meaningless laugh broke from her lips. The mass of white drapery was torn and snarled, the debris of broken glass, and blood dropped upon it, her white clenched hands.

One stride brought Lathrop to her side, while Randolph stood for an instant paralyzed by the awful spectacle. "What fiend's work is this?" he ejaculated.

They were none too soon, another moment and the woman would have laid a bleeding mass upon the ment below.

The child was nowhere to be seen.

As Randolph sprang to the young man's assistance suddenly reeled and his face blanched to the hue of paper.

There was no time for words, but Harry saw something more than the horror of the scene had stirred his old fears. At a signal from the latter for secrecy Harry assisted, securing the unhappy woman and aided in her removal to a remote room in the large old house. Randolph then confided his unhappy charge—whose violent paroxysms spent itself—to the old and trusted housekeeper, and ordered to summon a physician to the side of the woman.

On their return to the chamber they discovered the woman lying in an insensible heap upon one of the landings, doubtless she had fled in terror.

Lathrop raised her in his arms, and now it was Lathrop who became aghast. For he instantly recognized in the woman upturned to his in the uncanny light the woman who that day claimed the child he had brought to his home for care.

"You do not know me," she said, faintly. "I am Ghart, the circus rider—the woman who stole your first lover from her—she has revenged herself to-day with the cunning of the insane she dealt what she intended should be my deathblow. It may be—I have a story to make;" she paused for breath, then pointed to the Thistledown, who had recovered and was gazing about in bewilderment.

he touched a small turquoise locket which she wore attached to her chatelaine.
Open it."

Randolph did so. He had become terribly agitated from the moment his eyes fell upon the bauble.

She is not my child—this may give you a clue to her entanglement. She was found outside the tents one night in Colorado. I wished a little girl to train for the army. She pleased me and I adopted her."

At this juncture the doctor arrived and turning their attention to the child, Randolph carried her to the library, where young Lathrop joined him.

"I had not told you the worst of my story, Harry," he

said. "I had a daughter, a babe, whom she bore away with her on that awful night. Long I have pondered my little girl's fate. This night's work has set doubt at an end. The girl you saw in that mad creature upstairs, and there can be no uncertainty as to Thistledown being our little girl, whose strange destiny it has been to find a guardian in her mother's worst enemy. This trinket was attached to the child's neck on the day of its disappearance. Within the initials I myself had engraved," and he laid open the young man's gaze the blue locket, "P. L. R." At sight of this cipher Harry Lathrop uttered a cry of astonishment.

Pauline Lillian Randolph, my little one was christened. As in the town of D—. We were sojourning at the time. Only the date is needed to confirm the evidence I can have that Thistledown is my own child."

"Look at this," cried Lathrop. He had taken from a memorandum-book he carried a strand of gold. It was the little golden chain which the eagle had let fall before upon that wild western roadway. Upon its surface were engraven the initials "P. L. R." From a leaf in his pocketbook he read the date of its recovery.

"If I am able," said Mr. Randolph, "to trace the wanderings that have led my poor crazed wife to her old home I will learn what strange fortune has been hers during these years. My belief is she was not in reality insane when she left me, but some accident causing her to lose the babe became so. As for you, Harry, what can I ever do to repay to you how grateful I am for the blessing you have given me the means of restoring to me?" And the delighted father stroked the silken tresses of his little new-found daughter.

Several years later Harry Lathrop let him know what he could do by claiming a very large interest in the discovered treasure.

For Mrs. Randolph's life went out at last in the same madness wherein it had so long dwelt. Her husband succeeded in learning a few facts (sad ones, indeed), concerning the life that—like many another—had been so wholly marred in its early youth by the world's harsh touch. His friend Ghart recovered from her wound to find a violent death at last in a fall from her horse while rehearsing for an untried performance.

But her name is never mentioned in the presence of the late Pauline, the memory of the coarse, brutal life of her childhood filling her with horror. And well Harry Lathrop knows he holds the unbounded love of his wife though that one bold act which had forever separated her from that cruel past.

THE MIDNIGHT CRIME.

By Paul Braddon

Charles Van was the descendant of one of the oldest Knickerbocker families in America.

The estate on which he resided was one of the finest in the county, and had been in the family since the days of the earliest settlers.

It more resembled the seat of some noble than that of a plain citizen of a republic, and the establishment was conducted with a lordly disregard of expense.

The lavish expenditure, however, had at last begun to tell, and it was rumored that the property was mortgaged to almost its full value.

Mr. Van was a widower, with one daughter.

She was a remarkably beautiful girl, with a sweetness of disposition that made her loved by every one who knew her.

At the period of my story she was about eighteen years old.

At certain seasons of the year the old house was full of visitors, but it so chanced that when the owner's second cousin, Mr. Henry Walworth, came to stay for a few weeks at his relative's house there was no one there but the usual household.

This Mr. Walworth was a man of nearly sixty.

He was very wealthy, and had the reputation of being, except in his own personal gratifications, very penurious. For any whim of his own, however, he never paused to consider the expense.

His visit extended nearly three weeks, and it was plain to be seen he had fallen in love with his host's beautiful daughter, with all the disregard of probable consequences common to men of his age.

Apparently, however, his passion was quite unsuspected by the young lady herself, and the day was at last fixed for his departure, without anything being said on the subject.

The apartments Mr. Walworth occupied were three in number, and consisted of two bedrooms and a central sitting-room.

One of these sleeping apartments was occupied by his valet, the other by himself, and each of the three had a door opening into the hall.

About one o'clock on the night before the day fixed for their departure, the valet was awakened by the sound of something falling heavily.

He was about to start from the bed, when he heard his master's voice, swearing in a peevish tone, as if he had accidentally knocked something down.

The valet, after listening for a few moments, and hearing nothing further, again went to sleep.

The following morning, when he awoke, he was surprised to find the door of the sitting-room ajar.

The one communicating with his master's sleeping chamber was also open, and, wondering that he had risen so early, the valet entered, when he saw him lying on the bed in a pool of blood, stabbed.

He gave the alarm at once, and the result of the investigations seemed to point to the conclusion that Mr. Van was the assassin.

The weapon with which the deed had been done was found lying on the floor beside the bed.

It was an old Scotch dirk of peculiar workmanship, which every person in the house recognized as belonging to the accused man, and which usually hung among some other curious specimens of arms in the library.

It was also proven by a servant who had overheard them, that on the previous day the host and guest had had a violent quarrel.

The latter had avowed his love for Miss Van and asked her father's consent to his suit.

This had been refused, and Walworth had sworn that as soon as he reached the metropolis the following day a mortgage he held on a portion of the estate should be foreclosed, and a will in which the debt was canceled and a legacy mentioned, destroyed.

This explained the motive of the crime, while further evidence proved that at three o'clock he had been seen leaving the murdered man's sitting-room.

His own behavior also was that of conscious guilt.

The case certainly looked very dark against him, and the jury were justified in bringing in a verdict of wilful murder against him.

He was accordingly committed for trial.

Hardly had the verdict been given than a new ally appeared for the accused man.

This was a young man of about twenty-seven, the son of one of the most wealthy residents of the place.

He was deeply in love with Miss Van, and determined that if money could accomplish it the stigma should be removed from her father's name.

He called upon Tom Weston, a detective.

Tom at once proceeded to the scene of the tragedy.

In the character of a sailor who had been absent for more than twelve years, he made the acquaintance of all the male members of the household, and by the liberal display of cash got also into the good graces of more than one of the opposite sex.

In this way he learned the domestic arrangements of the house, and in all their confidences there was one name often mentioned that attracted his attention.

It was that of Raymond.

Who was this Raymond?

Judicious inquiry elicited the fact that he had been Miss Van's tutor in Italian and music.

He was a man between thirty and forty, of very eccentric habits, and with a wild manner that made people, until they came to know him, think he was partially crazed.

This wildness of manner was more noticeable than usual when he saw Mr. Walworth, or when even his name was mentioned.

He had packed his trunk and left the house two nights before the murder had been done.

A suspicion began to grow in the detective's mind, and he resolved to request an interview with Miss Van.

His request was granted, and the result was such as to deepen the suspicion into a definite theory.

A night or two before his departure, Raymond had made a mad avowal of love for her.

His manner was so vehement and wild that she had been frightened, and as soon as he had left the room, vowing, as he did so, that if he did not possess her love no other

man should, she had gone to her father and related the whole affair.

The result was that the tutor had received notice to quit the house at once.

A further inquiry in another direction also brought to light the fact that the tutor had been seen at a small town about ten miles distant on the morning of the murder.

Provided with a photograph, and also a minute description of the man, the detective followed him, and for more than a week was indefatigable in his search, but without avail.

At length chance, or the Nemesis that follows crime, accomplished what his most strenuous endeavours had failed to do.

Late one night, a message was brought from the hotel that a patient who had been brought in that day had confessed to make in regard to the Van murder.

I asked permission to accompany the officer, and it was granted, together we made all haste to the hospital.

The poor wretch was Raymond. He had been run over and mortally hurt internally, while his spine was broken.

Already the ashen hues of death were upon his face. "You all hear me," he said, huskily. "Mr. Van is innocent. It was I who killed Walworth. Yes, I killed him for he wanted to take her, my love, from me. I dared to think she could be mine, but I could not sacrifice to him, I loved her so; but she spurned me still—still I loved her. I——"

The words died away in a husky rattle, a shiver through his frame, and all was over.

The hand of death had touched him, and his lot in crime alike had passed out of the retribution of humanity into the mercy of the unknown.

Of course, when this confession was made public, Miss Van was at once released.

"All is well that ends well," and a few months later the old homestead was joyous with the sound of wedding festivities as her true lover led to the altar its daughter and her bride.

Beards have been taxed at various times and in various countries. In England, during the reign of Elizabeth, every beard of a fortnight's growth was subject to a tax of three shillings four pence. Peter the Great, in 1717, imposed a tax of one hundred roubles upon the beards of the Russian nobles, while the common people's beards amounted to one kopec for each person. This tax caused much dissatisfaction; but, in spite of this, the impost was extended to St. Petersburg in 1714. The tax was confirmed by Catherine I. in 1726, by Peter II. in 1728, by the Empress Anne in 1731, and in 1743 by Empress Elizabeth. It was repealed by Catharine II. in 1762. In France a beard tax was imposed upon the clergy. The celebrated Duprat, Lord High Chancellor of France, was the advocate of the measure, and a bull was published by the pope, enjoining the clergy to shave their beards. Then a tax was levied by the king upon all who were exempted from the harsh decree. The bishops and other rich clergy who could afford the means paid the tax, but the poorer clergy were obliged to yield at the point of the razor.

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Bushels of fun! "Froggy" has got a very croaking and rasping voice, and when held in the hollow of the hand and made to croak, one instinctively looks around for a bullfrog. An amusing joke can be played on your friends by passing the ratchet-wheel of the frog down their coat-sleeve or the back of their coat. The ripping, tearing noise gives them a severe shock, and they heave a sigh of relief when they find that their clothes are whole as before. A good joke is once a gentleman's or lady's watch under. With the frog concealed in your you take the stem of the watch between thumb and finger, and at the same time allow the ball of your thumb to turn the ratchet-wheel of the frog, when company you will seem to be winding it, but the noise will startle them, and sound more like winding Barnum's calypso than a watch, and you can keep indefinitely. The possessor of one of these Frog Jokers can have any amount with it. It is made of bronze metal and never wears out. Do not fail to send. Price, 10c., 3 for 25c. by mail, postpaid dozen by express, 75c.

KENNEDY, 308 West 127th St., N. Y.

GREAT PANEL TRICK.

This remarkable illusion consists of a simple, plain wooden panel, octagonal in shape, with no signs of a trick about it. The panel can be examined by any one; you then ask for a penny or silver coin and place it in the center of the panel; then at the word command the coin immediately disappears, not change the position of the panel time, but hold it in full view of the eye all the time. The coin does not go to the performer's hand, nor into his pocket, neither does it drop upon the floor. This illusion is as wonderful as the word of command the coin again appears upon the center of the panel as mysteriously as it went. We send full printed instructions by the aid of which any one can do the trick, to the astonishment and of their friends. Price, 15c., 2 for mail postpaid.

NOVELTY CO., 29 W. 26th St., N. Y.

"UNCLE SAM" BANKS.

For Quarters, Nickels, Dimes, and Pennies. Every deposit registers. Quarter Banks register \$50 deposits at \$20.00, the Nickel Bank holds 200 deposits or \$10.00, the Dime Bank holds 200 deposits or \$20.00, and the Penny Bank contains 100 deposits or \$1.00. These banks are about 4 1/2 inches long, 4 inches high, wide and weigh from 7-8 lbs. to 1-2 lbs. They are made of heavy cold rolled steel, beautifully ornamented, and cannot be tampered with until the full amount of their capacity is reached. When the coin is put in the bank a lever is pressed, a bell rings. The bank always shows the amount in the bank. The mechanism is securely placed in each of meddlesome fingers. It is the safest, and most reliable bank made is no key, but locks and unlocks automatically. Price, \$1.00 each.

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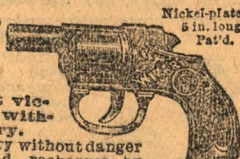
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ELECTRIC PUSH BUTTON.

The base is made of maple, and the center piece of black walnut, the whole thing about 1 1/2 inches in diameter, with a metal hook on the back so that it may be slipped over edge of the vest pocket. Expose to view your New Electric Bell, when your friend will push the button expecting to hear it ring. As soon as he touches it, you will see some of the liveliest dancing you ever witnessed. The Electric Button is heavily charged and will give a smart shock when the button is pushed. Price, 10c., by mail, postpaid.

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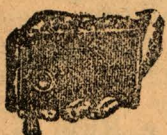
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Foxy Grandpa, Mr. Peewee and other comical faces artistically colored, to which is attached a long rubber tube, connected with a rubber ball, which can be filled with water, the rubber ball being carried in the pocket, slight pressure on the bulb causes a long stream, the result can easily be seen.

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A full pack of 53 cards, but by the aid of the instructions given, anyone can perform the most wonderful tricks. Many of the feats exhibited are truly marvelous, and astonish and amuse a whole audience. Positively no sleight-of-hand. The whole trick is in the cards. Price, 35c. by mail, postpaid.

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The importance of carrying a good reliable pencil need not be dwelt upon here. It is an absolute necessity with us all. The holder of this pencil is beautifully nicked with grooved box-wood handle, giving a firm grip in writing; the pencil automatically supplies the lead as needed while a box of these long leads are given with each pencil. The writing of this pencil is indelible the same as ink, and thus can be used in writing letters, addressing envelopes, etc. Bills of account or invoices made out with this pencil can be copied the same as if copying ink was used. It is the handiest pencil on the market; you do not require a knife to keep it sharp; it is ever ready, ever safe, and just the thing to carry.

Price of pencil, with box of leads complete, only 10c.; 3 for 25c.; one dozen 90c. postpaid.

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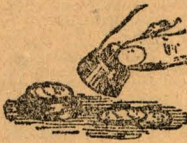
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Consist of a Swedish safety box, filled with matches, which will not light. Just the thing to cure the match borrowing habit. Price, 5c., postpaid.

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MAGIC COINER.



A mystifying and amusing trick. Tin blanks are placed under the little tin cup and apparently coined into dimes. A real money-maker. Price, 20c.

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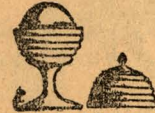
THE FOUNTAIN RING.



A handsome ring connected with a rubber ball which is concealed in the palm of the hand. A gentle squeeze forces water or cologne in the face of the victim while he is examining it. The ball can be instantly filled by immersing ring in water same as a fountain pen filler. Price by mail, postpaid, 12c. each.

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Astonishing, wonderful, and perplexing! Have you seen them? Any child can work them, and yet, what they do is so amusing that the sharpest people on earth are fooled. We cannot tell you what they do, or others would get next and spoil the fun. Just get a set and read the directions. The results will startle your friends and utterly mystify them. A genuine good thing if you wish to have no end of amusement.

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A perfect little bank, handsomely nickel plated. Holds just five dollars (50 dimes). It cannot be opened until the bank is full, when it can be readily emptied and relocked, ready to be again refilled. Every parent should see that their children have a small savings bank, as the early habit of saving their dimes is of the greatest importance. Habits formed in early life are seldom forgotten in later years. Price of this little bank, 10c.; 3 for 25c., mailed postpaid.

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They consist of Jungle sets, Map and Seal of States, Good Luck cards, Comics, with witty sayings and funny pictures, cards showing celebrated person's buildings, etc. In fact, there is such a great variety that it is not possible to describe them here. They are beautifully embossed in exquisite colors, some with glazed surfaces, and others in matt. Absolutely the handsomest cards issued. Price 15c. for 25 cards by mail.

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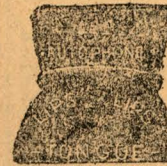
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